

Divisions Affected - All

CABINET

13 November 2025

Local Government Reorganisation – Submission of Proposal to Government

Report of the Chief Executive

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to

- A) Note all three proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (**Annex 1, 2 and 3**)
- B) Agree that One Oxfordshire, the single county unitary proposal is a “*robust and sustainable unitary proposal that is in the best interests of the whole area*” as requested by the then Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution in his letter of 5 February 2025 attached as **Annex 4**.
- C) Approve the One Oxfordshire proposal for submission to government in accordance with their deadline of 28 November 2025.
- D) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer in consultation with the Leader to make any changes to the text and/or format of the One Oxfordshire proposal prior to submission to government whilst not materially affecting the overall content of the proposal.
- E) Delegate to the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader, the formal submission of the proposal to government to meet the 28 November 2025 deadline, following any changes agreed at Cabinet and any subsequent changes made under the delegation at Recommendation D above.

Executive Summary

2. On 5 February 2025, an invitation from the then Minister of State of Local Government and English Devolution to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) by 28 November 2025 was received by Oxfordshire’s council Leaders. In that letter, the Minister also requested that interim plans for LGR be submitted to government by 21 March 2025.

3. On 21 March 2025 Cabinet agreed to submit an interim plan for LGR in Oxfordshire in concert with city, and district councils in which a total of three proposals were detailed – a single council for all Oxfordshire, two Councils including West Berkshire and three Councils, also including West Berkshire.
4. That interim plan stated, *“This Council (the county council) would create a single front door for all local authority services across the historic and recognised County of Oxfordshire, delivering high quality, value-for-money, resilient and responsive services to residents, visitors, businesses, institutions and investors. Most importantly it would provide the strategic and economic planning platform that can harness the potential of Oxfordshire’s economy for the UK while delivering much needed benefit for Oxfordshire’s residents.”*
5. The Council’s proposal enclosed at **Annex 1** has been developed on that basis and is to be submitted along with the two unitary and three unitary proposals to government by 28 November 2025. The Council is recommending the single unitary proposal which is a single countywide unitary – One Oxfordshire – the optimal form of LGR that best meets the government’s criteria.

Overview

6. LGR offers an extraordinary opportunity to reform the two-tier local government system that has existed in Oxfordshire for over 50 years.
7. The Ministerial invitation letter of 5 February 2025 inviting LGR proposals set out government’s vision for “simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution.” It also set the rationale for LGR as an “opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers.”
8. One Oxfordshire, the single Council for Oxfordshire, is considered the best model to meet this request, creating a better form of local government that is closer to communities, connected and cost effective, and most importantly, delivers the best outcomes for Oxfordshire’s residents.
9. The statutory invitation also establishes six criteria that proposals need to address. These will be used by the Minister to determine which LGR proposals to consult on and subsequently, which one proposal to implement.
 - (a) A single tier and sensible geography avoiding creating disadvantaged/advantaged areas.
 - (b) The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks - new Councils must be a minimum of 500,000 with exceptions on a case-by-case basis.
 - (c) Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services.
 - (d) Meets local need and is informed by local views.
 - (e) Supports devolution arrangements; and

- (f) Enables stronger community engagement and delivers genuine neighbourhood empowerment.
10. The proposal at **Annex 1** identifies where each of the criteria are met and an options appraisal has been undertaken to demonstrate objectively the merits of each option against each of the criteria (Chapter 1, section 1.3).

Financial Implications

11. Local government reform in Oxfordshire will take place in the context of a decade of austerity, significant service demand and cost pressures, economic vulnerabilities, global uncertainties as well as the Fair Funding Review 2.0. A very prudent approach to reorganisation and transformation savings has been included in the financial case given these risks, and to ensure any future financial shocks can be managed.
12. Total savings of £63.3m per annum are expected by Year 5. These comprise the savings from reorganisation of £30.1m, which will be achieved in full by Year 3 and savings from transformation of £33.2m achieved in full by Year 5. In total, net savings of £162.6m will be achieved by Year 5.
13. The cost of transition to a new council is estimated to be a one-off sum of £21.9m. The payback period for One Oxfordshire is therefore approximately 1.3 years, with total savings from reorganisation alone of £104.5m by Year 5.
14. While transition costs will be repaid through savings achieved through reorganisation, the Council has already committed £10m from earmarked reserves, which can be used towards the cost of local government reform and devolution. It is expected that the Year 0 transition costs will be met from this reserve so recurring savings will start in Year 1.
15. Following transition, a single unitary council for Oxfordshire will be able to generate further annual savings through transformation of £33.2m a year by Year 5. One-off costs of transformation are expected to be £16.6m.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

16. Local government reorganisation is governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Secretary of State can at any time invite proposals for a single tier of local government from local authorities and also has the power to direct authorities to submit proposals.

17. The Council has been invited to submit a proposal for local government reorganisation in accordance with Section 7 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and has been asked to submit a finalised proposal by 28 November 2025.
18. The approval of the Council's final proposal for submission to government is an executive function in accordance with Section 9D(2) of the Local Government Act 2000.
19. Following submission of the final proposal by 28 November 2025, should the government decide to implement any proposal, legislation will have to be agreed by parliament prior to moving to elections to new "shadow" unitary authorities. At this stage it is envisaged that these elections would be held in May 2027.
20. A shadow authority is one that is elected to carry out the functions of a new unitary council until that authority formally comes into being. This is commonly called "vesting day" and is anticipated to be 1 April 2028.
21. The best value duty is contained in Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 from which the Council is under a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This report and the proposal at Annex 1 set out the financial and other implications of the recommended final proposal for One Oxfordshire which Members are advised to consider in full.

Comments checked by:

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Equality & Inclusion Implications

- 22 Having considered the proposal and the Equalities Impact Assessment, Cabinet can take assurance that the principal risks are understood and align with the areas where the proposal itself sets the highest expectations (safe/legal Day-1, continuity of critical services, one front door, localism).
- 23 The EIA finds a neutral-to-positive equalities position, contingent on disciplined transition management and ongoing monitoring by protected characteristic. A single council model enables more consistent access to services, reduces fragmentation, and supports county-wide strategies to tackle deprivation and health inequalities.

24 The recommended no-regret actions (Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) for continuity/equalities, cautious policy harmonisation, early localism standing-up, provider payment assurance, and workforce equality monitoring) are proportionate and within the direction of travel already set by the proposal; they do not pre-commit unapproved policy.

25 See **Annex 5** for the One Oxfordshire Equalities Impact Assessment

Risk Management

26 For details of the One Oxfordshire risk management process see the proposal at **Annex 1**, Chapter 7, section 7.3

Consultations

27 For details of the One Oxfordshire engagement see the proposal at **Annex 1**, Chapter 4

28 This included a meeting of Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 September in which the issues such as diseconomies of scale, pension strain, the powers of the MSA, future role of Parish and Town Councils, area committees and financial resilience.

Martin Reeves, Chief Executive

Annex:

Annex 1 – One Oxfordshire Proposal
Annex 2 – Greater Oxford and Shires, and Ridgeway Proposal
Annex 3 – North Oxfordshire, Ridgeway and Greater Oxford Proposal
Annex 4 – 250205 JM LGR invitation to leaders Oxfordshire Final
Annex 5 – EIA for One Oxfordshire proposal

Background papers: Cabinet ([Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday, 20 March 2025, 2.00 pm | Oxfordshire County Council](#))

[Other Documents:] Nil

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November 2025

Annex 1

[One Oxfordshire | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Annex 2

[Home - Two Councils](#)

Annex 3

[Three councils for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire – Oxford City Council](#)