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Our Reference: TVDEVO

20 March 2026

Dear Ministers,

Expression of Interest for a Thames Valley Strategic Authority

We, the Leaders in Thames Valley, are submitting this Expression of Interest (EOI) in response to your letter of 12 February 2026 and following our meeting with the Minister, Miatta Fahnbulleh, on 10 March 2026.

Further to our previous correspondence and discussions we have a compelling case for a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) and electing a Mayor in 2028. The Minister was clear in our meeting on 10 March 2026 that ‘the economic case is made’, therefore if an FSA is the only means by which we can achieve that ambition we are ready to progress with an FSA and would like to express our aspirations for an election of a Mayor in May 2028, if that is considered to be achievable. The current mandate from our various Councils is to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority and, should the Minister support this EOI which endorses and expands upon our earlier EOI, we would require a further mandate from our Councils to propose the route through an FSA. We would propose to seek that mandate at pace prior to consultation on any formal proposal.

The following sets out how a Thames Valley Strategic Authority aligns fully with the principles and expectations expressed in your letter of 12 February.

The Thames Valley is one of the UK’s most economically significant regions with the potential to rank as England’s second most productive economy per capita and the

third largest MSA by economic output. However, its potential is currently constrained by fragmented labour markets, infrastructure deficits, and the absence of a unified strategic authority. The Thames Valley is the only region among the UK's top ten economies not served by a directly elected mayor, creating a gap in representation and strategic oversight that could hinder our competitiveness, productivity and ability to deliver inclusive growth as identified in **Annex 1**.

The Thames Valley faces major constraints to growth that we believe can only be unlocked by a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). Priority growth areas such as the Oxfordshire to Cambridge corridor continue to face significant imbalances in investment, infrastructure, and governance. While neighbouring regions benefit from coordinated leadership and targeted support, the Thames Valley risks being left behind in terms of economic development and regional planning. This, in turn, would impact the Government's own plan for growth.

Expression of Interest

Our EOI seeks to formalise a strategic governance model that can unlock the region's full potential, support national missions, and deliver benefits for residents, employers, and the wider UK economy.

The Government's invitation sets out several expectations for FSAs. We summarise each requirement below and show how the Thames Valley proposal meets them.

a) Clear functional economic geography

The Thames Valley already operates as a polycentric but coherent economic region. Despite current fragmentation, our economic data shows:

- A combined population of **1.97 million**.
- A GVA of **£97.3 billion** (2023).
- Nationally significant assets, including world-leading universities, innovation districts (Harwell, Culham, Aldermaston), and global employers along the M4/M40 corridors.

Our EOI directly responds to Government's requirement for FSAs to demonstrate a clear economic footprint and the ability to operate at scale.

b) Partnership and collaboration across local government

Collaboration across the Thames Valley is already strong and mature:

- The **Berkshire Prosperity Board** brings unitary councils together around shared economic priorities.
- The **Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee** provides long-standing strategic leadership across county and district councils.
- Joint programmes such as the **Oxford Growth Commission**, **England's Economic Heartland**, the **Oxford-Cambridge Corridor**, and

cross-boundary transport planning demonstrate our readiness to work collectively.

Formalising this collaboration under a Strategic Authority meets Government expectations for credible and effective partnership structures.

c) Capacity to deliver strategic functions

The region is prepared to take on strategic functions, including:

- Transport and connectivity (Local Transport Plan, rail investment coordination, bus franchising assessment).
- Housing and regeneration (Spatial Development Strategy, accelerated delivery models).
- Skills (integration with LSIPs, alignment with priority growth sectors, stronger links with DWP).
- Economic development (inward investment, innovation acceleration, coordinated regional planning).

These functions align directly with the February letter's expectation that FSAs must focus on the strategic levers that support economic growth and national priorities.

At our meeting with you on 10 March 2026 it was recognised that the FSAs needed to be strengthened beyond the powers and responsibilities that were originally included in the devolution framework set out by Government. We remain committed to securing a Mayoral Strategic Authority at pace, with your agreement, for the Thames Valley to maximise the benefits to the regional economy. This EOI is submitted in good faith that Government will ensure FSAs have the necessary powers, funding and responsibilities to drive the regional economy, creating a springboard for a future MSA investment strategy that attracts significant institutional and cross-sector inward investment, enabling the objectives of a Thames Valley Growth Plan.

d) Alignment to national missions

Our proposal aligns with the Government's mission to kickstart economic growth particularly focused in these areas:

- **Innovation** – leveraging R&D clusters, supporting diffusion of innovation.
- **Skills** – boosting access to high-value employment, tackling economic inactivity.
- **Housing** – addressing affordability constraints that undermine productivity.
- **Net zero and energy resilience** – embedding climate adaptation and sustainability into growth planning.
- **Infrastructure** – unlocking grid, water and transport constraints that currently limit business expansion.

e) Strong case for an effective governance model

The Thames Valley offers a distinctive opportunity for Government:

We are not seeking to generate growth from a low base; we are seeking to unlock constraints in one of the UK's most productive regions. Delivering full economic integration could generate:

- **£18.7 billion** additional GVA annually by 2040.
- **£7 billion** additional annual tax revenue.

This represents one of the strongest potential returns of any proposed Strategic Authority.

Strategic Purpose

To create a joined-up, high-performing regional economy by reducing fragmentation, strengthening collaboration, and enabling transport, housing, skills, and economic policy to operate at the scale of the real functional economic area.

The proposed FSA builds on—and does not replace—the responsibilities of unitary councils. Councils retain control of local service delivery; the Strategic Authority provides the scale, coherence, and convening power needed for:

- Region-wide spatial planning.
- Integrated labour market strategies.
- Long-term infrastructure planning.
- Coordinated transport and skills investment.

Governance and Readiness

We propose establishing the Thames Valley Strategic Authority through a partnership governance model with clear accountability, transparent decision-making and strong local leadership.

The region's established track record of joint working demonstrates both readiness and credibility.

Proposed Strategic Functions

The Strategic Authority would lead or coordinate the following strategic functions:

Transport and Connectivity

- Develop an integrated Local Transport Plan Coordinate strategic rail priorities including East-West Rail, Western Rail Approaches, Southern Access, and Oxford-Reading-Swindon links.
- Explore bus franchising to increase reliability, access, and affordability.
- Enhance digital connectivity across rural and urban areas.

Skills and Employment

- Align Adult Skills Funding and LSIPs with regional labour market needs.
- Work with DWP on joint initiatives to tackle economic inactivity and youth unemployment.
- Strengthen employer-education partnerships.

Housing and Spatial Planning

- Develop a Spatial Development Strategy aligned with regional economic priorities.
- Work with Homes England and the Oxford Growth Commission on delivery vehicles to accelerate housing supply.
- Coordinate infrastructure delivery to unlock major housing sites.

Economic Development and Innovation

- Create a single Local Growth Plan (subject to these powers being included in the FSA model).
- Coordinate inward investment activity.
- Establish a UKRI-backed Innovation Accelerator.
- Support sector-specific clusters including life sciences, defence and security, and advanced manufacturing.

Environment, Net Zero and Climate Resilience

- Deliver a regional climate resilience framework.
- Accelerate nature recovery, flood mitigation, and green infrastructure.

Health, Wellbeing and Public Service Integration

- Work closely with the Integrated Care Board to link economic development with wealth and wellbeing outcomes.

Public safety

- Work with the Thames Valley Police to ensure alignment of policing objectives with the strategic objectives and delivery of the new authority.
- Subject to amendments to the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, provide a singular Fire and Rescue Authority aligned to the boundaries of the new strategic authority.

Distinctiveness of the Thames Valley Proposal

The Thames Valley Strategic Authority differs from existing arrangements in key ways:

- An established high-growth region seeking to remove constraints,
- Multiple complementary hubs rather than a single dominant city.
- Strong innovation assets aligned with national missions.
- It meets all the key priority sectors identified in the industrial strategy.

- A proven ability to deliver growth quickly when barriers are removed.

Next Steps

We welcome the opportunity to engage further with Government officials to refine our proposal, including:

- Working through governance options and timetabling to assist the Government's public sector reform agenda.
- Identifying appropriate fiscal tools aligned to the region's growth model.

We stand ready to support, at pace, the Government's ambition for a nationwide network of Strategic Authorities and to demonstrate how the Thames Valley can play a leading role in national economic renewal.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr Liz Leffman
Leader
Oxfordshire County Council

**On behalf of the
Oxfordshire Leaders**



Cllr Dexter Smith
Leader
Slough Borough Council

**On behalf of the
Berkshire Prosperity Board**