

Appendix A: Engagement document

ONE OXFORDSHIRE



SIMPLER



**MORE
LOCAL**



LOWER COST



**BETTER
SERVICES**



**ONE new council for the whole of Oxfordshire?
Join the debate**

Local government in Oxfordshire - time for a change?

We think so.

We believe the current system is complicated, wasteful and no longer financially sustainable. Without change, important local services could be reduced and some may be cut altogether.

Oxfordshire has six councils – one county council, four district councils and one city council. We think all six councils should be **ABOLISHED** and be replaced by just **ONE new council** for the whole of Oxfordshire. It would save over £100m in the first five years - money that could be used to improve local services and keep council tax down.

This is called a 'unitary' council. It would be simpler; offer better services; respond better to local priorities; and be more efficient and cost less to run.

This is what we mean by ONE Oxfordshire. We would like to know what you think of our draft proposals.



How services are currently organised

Oxfordshire currently has a two-tier system of local government. Some services are run by Oxfordshire County Council and others are run by the district or city council for your area.

This can be very confusing. For instance, the district councils collect your bins and the county council disposes of their contents. The district councils are responsible for benefits and social housing, while the county council provides social services.

County council services

- Child protection
- Fostering and adoption
- Adult social services
- Education support
- Roads and transport
- Fire and rescue service
- Waste disposal
- Public health
- Libraries
- Trading standards
- Countryside access
- Parking

District/city council services

- Housing and benefits
- Parks & leisure
- Local planning
- Street cleaning
- Waste collection
- Environmental health
- Council tax collection
- Electoral registration

Town councils and parishes

There are also over 300 town councils and parishes in Oxfordshire. They provide local services in some areas including allotments,

cemeteries and crematoria, common land, community centres and village halls. Giving town councils and parishes more say over services in their community is an important part of our proposals.



“It is not always clear what services are controlled by which council. The fewer tiers the better for transparency.”

Public submission to call for evidence for Grant Thornton review of options for local government.

The need for change

Since 2010, central government funding for councils has steadily reduced and will continue to do so. In future, council services will mainly be paid for locally from council tax and business rates.

At the same time, the demand for many council services (particularly for children and adult social services) is rising as the county's population grows and people get older.

We believe that the current six council system is not financially sustainable in the long term. Without change, important local services could be reduced and some may be cut altogether.



Why "ONE Oxfordshire?"

Two independent studies for the county and the district councils show at least £100m could be saved over five years by creating a single council for Oxfordshire. (This takes into account the one-off £16m cost of reorganisation.)

That's at least £20 million extra to spend each year on improving services, protecting them from further cuts, and keeping council tax down.

One council costs less to run than six councils, with one administration and fewer managers.

Counties including Wiltshire, Durham and Cornwall already have a 'unitary' council, and others such as Buckinghamshire recently asked the government to become a unitary council.

We believe one council for Oxfordshire would be simpler, better for services, more local and cost less.



We believe one council better for services, more

SIMPLER

- One website, one phone number, one contact for all your council services
- Other public services such as the NHS and police could work better with one council rather than several
- Businesses have a single point of contact for services such as trading standards, licensing and planning
- Joined-up planning for jobs, homes and transport is better for residents and the local economy
- One council taking decisions in the best interests of the whole of Oxfordshire

BETTER SERVICES

- Savings could be used to improve maintenance, including roads
- One council is responsible for all the environmental services such as street cleaning and road maintenance in your area
- Joining up social services, housing and benefits makes it easier to support people who need extra help
- One council for Oxfordshire can keep vulnerable children and adults safer

“ If it maintains the status quo... local government will not be fulfilling its wider duty to ensure Oxfordshire retains and leverages its competitive advantage for the benefit of the people and places it serves.”

Oxfordshire Unitary Government Study, PwC, commissioned by district and city councils

Are there other options?

Independent studies were commissioned by the county council, and city and district councils. They also looked at splitting the county into two, three or four smaller unitary councils, as well as the 'no change' option.

After looking at the evidence, the county council concluded that replacing the existing six councils with a single unitary council for Oxfordshire is the best way to save money and improve services. The city/district councils' own study accepted that the greatest savings were from a single unitary council for Oxfordshire.

There has been some local debate about the best way to reorganise local government, but ONE Oxfordshire is the only firm proposal to have been produced.

for Oxfordshire would be simpler,
e local and cost less to run.

MORE LOCAL

- One local councillor representing your community who is accountable for all council services in your area
- Parishes and town councils have more influence over decisions for their own communities
- Your councillor takes local decisions as members of 'area boards' covering existing district/city areas

LOWER COST

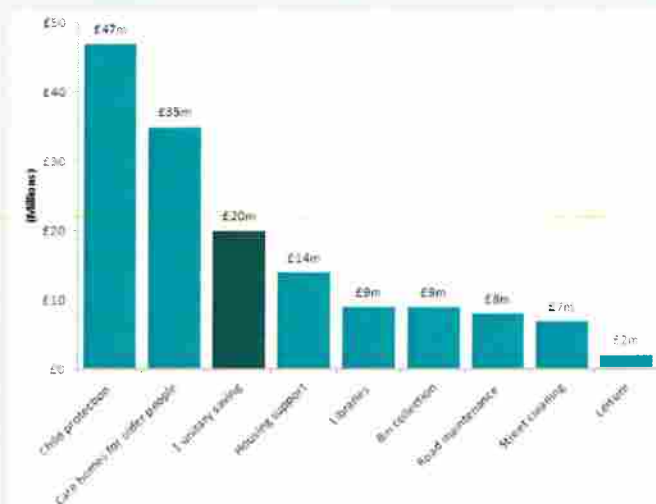
- No duplication – abolishing six councils to create one, brand new council costs less to run with fewer councillors and senior managers
- One council saves £20m each year, which can be used to deliver better services and protect them from future cuts
- Keeps council tax down



What could the savings mean for services?

The £20m annual savings from the ONE Oxfordshire proposal could be used to increase spending on any council service. The decision on how to use the savings would be made by the new councillors elected to the new council.

To give an idea of the impact of another £20m, this bar chart shows the net budgets for different council services in Oxfordshire. (District services - leisure, housing, bins and street cleaning - are combined budgets for all five district councils.)



Department of Communities and Local Government revenue account forms

What does the proposal mean for council tax?

The new unitary council would be responsible for decisions about council tax and budgets to pay for services. Savings made from abolishing all six councils could be used to pay for better services and keeping council tax down. We are asking the government for powers to allow council tax to be varied for different areas, according to local priorities decided by local councillors.

ONE

OXFORDSHIRE

More benefits of the

Better planning for growth and infrastructure

Oxfordshire's roads are already heavily congested, particularly the A34 and A40, and investment is urgently needed.

Employers say that a lack of housing and transport infrastructure is slowing business growth, which is needed to create jobs for younger people.

Oxfordshire has some of the most unaffordable housing in the country, and we need 100,000 more homes to support the 80,000 new jobs predicted by 2031. This growth needs to be properly managed to make sure roads, schools and other infrastructure is in place.

Different councils are currently responsible for planning and transport, so there can be no single joined up development plan for the county as a whole. This makes taking decisions in the interests of the whole county more difficult.

The ONE Oxfordshire proposals include plans for a new £1bn investment fund that could use public and private sector money to pay for the infrastructure the county needs.

A joined-up planning system for housing, transport and jobs would manage growth properly and get the investment we need. Otherwise, communities will get unplanned development without the necessary infrastructure.



Devolution for Oxfordshire?

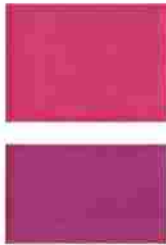
You may have heard of other areas doing 'devolution deals' with the government. This is when councils agree to work together to encourage economic growth in return for government handing over powers and funding.

The county, district and city councils are working together on a devolution plan, but this is **separate** from local government reorganisation. Government officials have said clearly that they will consider devolution and unitary proposals separately.

Agreeing a devolution deal with government is likely to mean creating a directly elected mayor for Oxfordshire and another layer of local government called a 'combined authority' to run transport and planning.

We think that a unitary council is a better and simpler option that links planning and transport more effectively, without needing yet another layer of local government.

However, we also recognise the importance of infrastructure and investment for Oxfordshire and will do all we can to make the devolution deal work.



ONE Oxfordshire proposals

Improving health and wellbeing

Unaffordable housing can lead to homelessness and families living in unsuitable, temporary housing. Good housing is vital to children getting the best start in life.

We also need more extra care housing in Oxfordshire. Older people can live independently in extra care housing, which is better for them and costs less than providing social care.

Joining up planning for housing and social services would provide more ways for older people to live independently, which improves wellbeing and reduces care costs.

Linking services such as town planning and leisure could encourage active lifestyles and improve public health, including childhood obesity.

More accountability for local communities

At the moment you have several councillors (district/city councillors and a county councillor) for your local area.

In the ONE Oxfordshire proposals, there would be fewer councillors. One unitary councillor would represent your local community for all services.

Your one councillor would take decisions for your local area on a new 'area board' and for the county as a whole as a member of the unitary council.

Local planning decisions could be taken by area boards within a county planning policy.

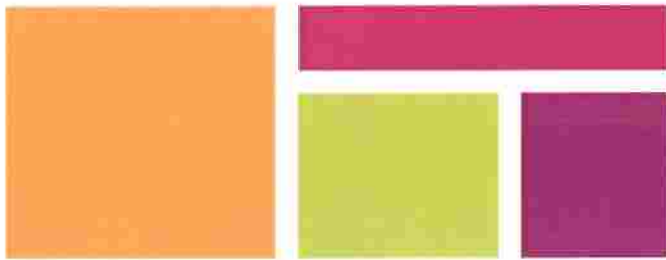
Area boards would work closely with town councils and parishes to give communities a strong voice in decisions, with an option to take on some additional powers and services if they want it.

Join the debate

The draft proposals were produced after discussions with a range of people, including other services such as the police and NHS; business; parishes and town councils; other councils and central government, and of course residents and service users.

By publishing the proposal as a draft, we want to continue the debate about the best way to run council services in Oxfordshire. A wide range of background material has been published to accompany our proposals.

We want to hear from residents, businesses and stakeholders so we can improve the proposals before sending it to the government.



Have your say

- Read the draft proposals and have your say online at www.oneoxfordshire.org
- Fill in a copy of the accompanying feedback form and hand it in at your local library or send it back using FREEPOST
- Come to a listening event in your local library
- Comments must be received by 28 February 2017.

What happens next?

Your feedback will be shared with all county councillors. A copy of the report of the public and stakeholder engagement and the proposals will be considered by county councillors (Cabinet members) on 14 March 2017.

The Secretary of State for Local Government is ultimately responsible for decisions about council reorganisation.

What will a new unitary council mean for me?

FOR RESIDENTS

- More efficient so more money spent on frontline services
- One website, one phone number, one council for all services
- One councillor for your area

FOR BUSINESSES

- Single voice for Oxfordshire
- More investment in infrastructure
- Joined up business services: planning, licensing, public protection

FOR PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERS

- Single point of contact and decision-making
- Boundaries that make sense (eg NHS, police)
- Single strategies and policies for the whole county

FOR TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

- Better support for neighbourhood planning
- More devolution of powers for those that want them

FOR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND REGIONAL PARTNERS

- A coherent vision for Oxfordshire
- A financially resilient council

FOR THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR

- Improved partnerships at community and strategic level
- Single organisation focusing on improving lives of people

Appendix B: Engagement questionnaire

Draft Proposals for Changing Local Government in Oxfordshire

FEEDBACK FORM

Oxfordshire County Council is seeking views on its draft proposals to change local government in Oxfordshire. Opinion Research Services (ORS) have been asked to support the council with this work.

Before filling in this form please read the summary of the county council's draft proposals available in all public libraries or online at www.oneoxfordshire.org
A wide range of supporting information is also available.

- To give your feedback online go to www.oneoxfordshire.org or
- Fill in a copy of this feedback form and hand it in at your local library or send it back using FREEPOST to the address on the back of this form, to arrive at ORS no later than 28 February 2017.

Oxfordshire has a two-tier system of local government. Some services are run by Oxfordshire County Council and others by the district or city council for your area. Oxfordshire has six councils in total – one county council plus four district councils and one city council.

Since 2010, central government funding for councils has steadily reduced and will continue to do so. In the future, council services will mainly be paid for locally from council tax and business rates. At the same time, the demand for many council services (particularly for children and adult social services) is rising as the county's population grows and people get older.

Oxfordshire County Council thinks the current system of local government is complicated, wasteful and no longer financially sustainable. It believes that without change, important local services could be reduced and some may need to be cut altogether.

Q1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that there is a need to reorganise local government in Oxfordshire? PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

Strongly agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Oxfordshire County Council believes that local government in Oxfordshire should be changed to a **'single tier'**, where one council provides all services in a particular area. This type of council is called a **'unitary council'** and there could be **one or more** unitary councils in Oxfordshire. Town and parish councils would not be affected.

Q2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the principle that a 'unitary council' should provide all council services in your particular area? PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Oxfordshire County Council believes the best way forward is to **ABOLISH** the current six councils and create **ONE new 'unitary council'** for the **WHOLE** of Oxfordshire.

Two independent studies for the county and the district councils show at least £100m could be saved over five years, taking into account the one-off £16m cost of reorganisation. This is money that could be used to improve services and keep council tax down.

Full details of Oxfordshire County Council's proposals are explained in its summary document. In particular the council believes ONE council for Oxfordshire would be **simpler, better for services, more local and cost less to run.**

<p style="text-align: center;">SIMPLER</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One website, one phone number, one contact for all your council services • Other public services such as the NHS and police could work better with one council rather than several • Joined-up planning for jobs, homes and transport is better for residents and the local economy • One council taking decisions in the best interests of the whole of Oxfordshire 	<p style="text-align: center;">BETTER SERVICES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One council is responsible for all the environmental services such as street cleaning and road maintenance in your area • Joining up social services, housing and benefits makes it easier to support people who need extra help • One council for Oxfordshire can keep vulnerable children and adults safer
<p style="text-align: center;">MORE LOCAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One local councillor representing your community who is accountable for all council services in your local area • Parishes and town councils have more influence over decisions for their own communities • Your councillor takes local decisions as members of 'area boards' covering existing district/city areas 	<p style="text-align: center;">LOWER COST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No duplication – abolishing six councils to create one, brand new council costs less to run with fewer councillors and senior managers • One council saves £20m each year, which can be used to deliver better services and protect them from future cuts • Keeps council tax down

Q3. If local government was changed in Oxfordshire, how important or unimportant would the following be to you?

PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX IN EACH ROW	Very important	Fairly important	Neither important nor unimportant	Fairly unimportant	Very unimportant	Don't know
Simpler local government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Better services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More local accountability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lower running costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q4a. To what extent do you agree or disagree with Oxfordshire County Council's draft proposals to ABOLISH the six councils and replace them with ONE new 'unitary council' for the WHOLE of Oxfordshire?

PLEASE TICK ✓ ONE BOX ONLY

Strongly agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to agree <input type="checkbox"/>	Neither agree nor disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Strongly disagree <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know <input type="checkbox"/>
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Q4b. If you do not agree with the county council's proposals for ONE 'unitary council' for the WHOLE of Oxfordshire, please say what you think the best option would be.

PLEASE ANSWER IN THE BOX BELOW AND CONTINUE ON A SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

Q5. Do you have any suggestions for how the county council's proposals for ONE 'unitary council' for the WHOLE of Oxfordshire could be improved?

PLEASE ANSWER IN THE BOX BELOW AND CONTINUE ON A SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

What is your full postcode?

This will help us understand views in different areas

If you are responding on behalf of an ORGANISATION, which organisation do you represent?

Please give us the name of the organisation and any specific group or department.

Please also tell us who the organisation represents, what area the organisation covers and how you gathered the views of members.

PLEASE ANSWER IN THE BOX BELOW AND CONTINUE ON A SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

If you are providing your own PERSONAL RESPONSE, please answer the questions below...

Oxfordshire County Council has a duty to promote equality and wants to make sure that it includes all parts of the community in its engagement exercise, but these questions are optional. It will take all responses fully into account when making decisions, regardless of whether you provide your details.

PLEASE TICK ✓ ONLY ONE BOX FOR EACH QUESTION

What was your age on your last birthday?

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55 to 64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16 to 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65 to 74 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 to 34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75 to 84 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35 to 44 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85 or over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 45 to 54 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say | |

What is your ethnic group?

- White
 Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
 Asian or Asian British
 Black, African, Caribbean or Black British
 Any other ethnic group
 Prefer not to say

What is your gender?

- Male
 Female
 Prefer not to say

Are you employed by a local authority in Oxfordshire?

- Yes
 No
 Prefer not to say

Do you consider yourself to be disabled?

- Yes
 No
 Prefer not to say

If yes, which local authority(ies) employ you?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Please return the feedback form to arrive no later than 28 February 2017 to:

Opinion Research Services

FREEPOST SS1018 · PO Box 530 · Swansea · SA1 1ZL

Appendix C: Submissions from Councils

Leader of the Council

Councillor Barry Wood



*Bodicote House
Bodicote
Banbury
Oxfordshire
OX15 4AA*

www.cherwell.gov.uk

1st March 2017

Please ask for: Councillor Barry Wood

Direct Dial:

Email:
Barry.Wood@Cherwell-
DC.gov.uk

Our Ref: BW/JP

Dear Ian and Peter,

Cherwell District Council Response to Oxfordshire County Council “One Oxfordshire” proposals for a unitary council

Whilst we consider it necessary to acknowledge that you have asked for views on your “One Oxfordshire” model for reforming local government across our area, we wish to make clear that we do not consider that we have been properly or formally consulted as a key stakeholder.

It is our strong view that there cannot be changes to the structure of local government within Oxfordshire without local consensus, including public, business and other key stakeholder support, and certainly not without serious consideration of the other options available. It is disappointing that you have either written off, or not considered those other options before deciding to ambush our communities and the Oxfordshire district councils with your preferred model.

There is strong evidence of mounting public and business opposition across the County to the “One Oxfordshire” model that you have been consulting on. In addition, three of the six council leaders and the majority of local MPs are also opposed to your proposal.

We are confident that this opposition will be further heightened when it becomes clear that the model you have been publicly consulting on is not the model that you appear to have



subsequently agreed behind closed doors with South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils as being the model you intend to submit to Government in March.

Where is the honesty and where is the transparency here?

Since launching your consultation you have announced jointly with South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils that you are now developing a joint bid for the Secretary of State and Government to consider; one which has fundamental changes to the proposals that formed the basis of public consultation.

It is disingenuous to engage in a public consultation exercise based on a specific model, and then fail to disclose to those who you are (and indeed are not) consulting that your proposal is changing, mid-way through the consultation process.

This raises serious questions about the integrity of your approach to consultation and of the trust we can place in you. This is no way to begin a journey of such monumental change with our constituents, or with the key stakeholders that you need to work with.

We do not believe it would be right for you to submit a bid to the Secretary of State to make fundamental and permanent changes to local government in Oxfordshire without proper consultation on a single set of proposals. With that in mind we ask that you are transparent about which set of proposals you intend to submit to Government, and that you consult and allow a reasonable period of time for response on those.

Consultation should be genuine, meaningful, timely, and recognised as consultation. It should include **all** the local authorities affected by your proposals both within Oxfordshire and beyond, such as our partner, South Northamptonshire Council and Cotswold District Council, the partner of West Oxford District Council. In both of these examples, any significant changes to the current operating model recommended by you will impact their future service delivery, their financial sustainability, their economic growth and the employment of their workforce.

There are significant omissions, unanswered questions and a lack of clarity and transparency about some extremely important issues that need to be addressed before a properly considered judgement can be reached on your proposals.

In places your document provides information which is incomplete and based on evidence which does not represent a balanced picture. For example, your portrayal of District's performance on housing delivery fails to recognise that Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxford are all delivering housing targets and have now agreed the allocation of 80% of Oxford's unmet need (with South Oxfordshire being the only local authority not to have agreed). Indeed Cherwell's reputation as an innovator in the housing sector is exemplary.

Examples of issues that require clarity so that they can be properly considered by all key stakeholders include:

- **The arrangements you are proposing for “enhancing local democracy and autonomy” through area boards**
Your “One Oxfordshire” model says there will be “area executive boards serving current district and city areas”. Your joint statement with South and Vale Councils says the new proposals will be for “decisions taken at a much more local level than offered by the area executive board model”. The Chief Executive of South and Vale Councils has subsequently advised us that the model would reflect something



nearer to 20 area boards. Which is correct and what are the implications of the latter?

- **How you will deliver on the proposal that such area boards will have tax raising powers**

This is not currently a legal proposition.

- **How do you propose to deal with the issue of council tax harmonisation?**

This is not explained in your consultation document. The work you cite from Grant Thornton suggests significant council tax rises for residents in some areas of the county. It is important that implications for residents across Oxfordshire are clarified before they can make an informed view of the proposals.

- **Savings**

More in depth analysis of the deliverability of the assumed savings is needed. The report by PwC into unitary options recommended that such an exercise would need to be developed in a business case for any one option.

- **What is the real cost of transition – both financial and non-financial?**

How do you propose to address the complex implications of unpicking the current and very successful contractual and collaborative working between Cherwell District Council and South Northamptonshire Council, and West Oxford District Council and Cotswold District Council? Have you even considered this in your model? Between Cherwell and South Northamptonshire Councils all of our services are now managed by a shared management team, and delivered through joint services. This is not just six district councils supporting six local areas you are proposing to dissolve and replace with one. Your proposals extend to impacting eight councils. Have you considered that?

- **What are your assumptions around delivery models which are currently raising income and delivering savings?**

The Cherwell and South Northamptonshire Councils partnership, described by government as being “exemplars of innovation” has developed a robust and imaginative strategic plan to ensure we are future-proofed; our “cycle of growth” will ensure our financial independence and sustainability. We see this as just one of the better alternatives to your model.

- **Clarity about what you are proposing as a new planning framework.**

Your “One Oxfordshire” consultation document says there will be a single local plan. However the joint statement with South and Vale Councils, and the subsequent comments of the Chief Executive of South and Vale Councils say that the planning framework protects and builds on existing and emerging local plans. Which is correct?

- **How do you propose to address the increasing budget pressures upon adult social care and who will be accountable?**

- **What are your plans for transforming services, particularly in the area of adult social care, and what efficiency savings do you expect them to deliver?**

- **Are you able to give assurances that the level of savings assumed in your proposals are sufficient to manage pressures and deal with the backlogs in**



social care, children's services, roads and highways maintenance and contribute to your infrastructure fund?

A single county unitary would be too large and remote, covering a population that would reach nearly 900,000 by 2031 if planned housing growth is delivered. Even at its current size it would be the third largest council in the country. The experience of Birmingham shows that unitary authorities of that scale can result in poor performance, inflexibility and a lack of focus on place with knock on cost to the local economy and local communities.

We believe that at this stage there are far too many unanswered questions for your proposals to be viewed as credible, or to instil trust in our communities and our workforce. We therefore reserve our detailed comments until you have set out a firm and transparent proposition, and one that all stakeholders are equally involved in, rather than negotiating private deals behind closed doors.

We are strongly of the view that a combined authority with an elected mayor is a better solution for Oxfordshire and for the UK economy as a whole, in the longer term. This would allow us to focus on the urgent and important priority of delivering our economic potential whilst protecting local decision making.

In a speech that he gave on 19th January, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government made it clear that Government remains committed to continuing with devolution, that it welcomes proposals from local areas and that areas that opt for a directly elected mayor will always be in line for the greatest degree of devolution.

The combined authority and devolution deal **would** avoid the considerable disruption and distraction of focus that would come from unnecessary reorganisation of local services that are highly performing. It **would** provide robust governance for devolution of new investment from government to the county, and drive joint working on strategic planning, transport, infrastructure, skills and economic growth. And it **would** be able to drive forward a collective transformation and efficiency programme that could deliver greater savings than those estimated in your preferred model.

We agree with the LEP that we should not be derailed by the pursuit of unitary ambitions which have lacked transparency and a recognition of the importance of being in touch with the local communities, and hold absolutely no consensus of support.

We therefore ask you to do the right thing. To continue with the work we collectively agreed to do jointly in developing our devolution deal proposals and enable us all to continue to focus on delivering local services to our communities and growing our local and national economy.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Barry Wood
Leader of the Council



Councillor Bob Price
Leader, Oxford City Council
Direct Line: 01865 252354
Fax: 01865 252256
Email: cllrprice@oxford.gov.uk
Website: www.oxford.gov.uk

Town Hall
Oxford
OX1 1BX
Switchboard: 01865 249811

www.oxford.gov.uk



Councillor Ian Hudspeth
Peter Clark

27th February 2017

Oxfordshire County Council
SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Ian and Peter,

Oxford City Council Response to Oxfordshire County Council “One Oxfordshire” proposals for a unitary county council

We do not believe we have been formally asked for views on the proposals set out in your One Oxfordshire document, however following a motion passed by the City Council which requested a robust response opposing the One Oxfordshire proposals and the results of our petition, we wanted to set out the City Council’s views on the proposals to date.

It is our strong view that there cannot be changes of the scale proposed without local consensus or public support. Three of the six council leaders and the majority of local MPs do not support the proposals and there is considerable public opposition– to date more than 5,800 residents have signed the petition against the proposals for a unitary county council. Since publishing your document and launching your consultation you have announced jointly with South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District councils that you are now developing a joint bid with fundamental changes to the proposals. As you have acknowledged, you have not yet produced a firm proposition and will be making significant changes to your proposals before submitting them to government.

We have raised with the County’s Head of Paid Service, our significant concerns that your consultation process is flawed and will not reflect a representative sample of residents views. In response you have indicated that the current exercise is not a full consultation.

We do not believe it would be right for you to submit bid to the Secretary of State to make fundamental and permanent changes to local government in Oxfordshire without proper consultation on a firm set of proposals. We therefore ask that you confirm a coherent set of proposals and consult on them allowing a reasonable time for a response before you submit them to the Secretary of State. This consultation should include the local authorities affected by the changes both within and Oxfordshire and those in neighbouring areas that are partnering with the districts on service arrangements.

There are significant omissions, unanswered questions and a lack of clarity about some important issues within your “One Oxfordshire” proposal that have significant implications for residents in Oxfordshire and local partners that need to be clarified before a properly considered judgement can be reached on your proposals. In places your document provides information which is incomplete and based on evidence which does not represent a balanced picture. For example, your portrayal of Districts’ performance on housing delivery fails to recognise that Oxford City, West and Cherwell are all delivering housing targets and have now agreed the allocation of 80% of Oxford’s unmet need (with South Oxfordshire being the only local authority not to have agreed). We also disagree with your assertion that Oxfordshire will miss its housing targets by 40,000 homes as our evidence suggests that at least 90,000 homes have high certainty of being delivered.

Examples of issues that require clarity in a firm proposition that can be properly considered include:

- The arrangements you are proposing for “enhancing local democracy and autonomy” through area boards. Your “One Oxfordshire” document says there will be “area executive boards serving current district and city areas”. Your joint statement with South and Vale says the new proposals will be for “decisions taken at a much more local level than offered by the area executive board model”. This suggests a complex and confusing patchwork of local governance arrangements.
- How you will deliver on the proposal that such area boards will have tax raising powers? This is not currently a legal proposition.
- What services, functions and powers will these bodies have? The proposals say this is not possible to determine in advance of the creation of a new unitary county council. Since your proposals are clear that this would be a new authority, how can any commitment or assurances given by the leaders of the councils promoting the proposals be given any weight?
- Precisely how will you deal with the issue of council tax harmonisation? This is not explained in your document. The work you cite from Grant Thornton suggests significant council tax rises for residents in some areas of the county. It is important that implications for residents across Oxfordshire are clarified before they can make an informed view of the proposals.
- More in depth analysis of the deliverability of the assumed savings is needed. The report by PwC in to unitary options recommended that such an exercise would need to be developed in a business case for any one option.
- What is the real cost of transition and what are the implications of unpicking the contractual and partnership arrangements each of the existing councils already has in place in order to achieve harmonisation?
- What are your assumptions around delivery models which are currently raising income and delivering savings?
- What governance arrangements are you proposing for the city which you recognise “needs to incorporate the very different social and economic make-up of Oxford city and its vitally important economic importance to the whole county”.
- Clarity about what you are proposing as a new planning framework. Your “One Oxfordshire” document says there will be a single local plan, the joint statement with South and Vale says that planning framework will build on existing and emerging local plans.
- What are your assumptions about increasing budget pressures for adult social care, what are your plans for transformation of your services in this area and what efficiency savings do you expect them to deliver?

- Whether the level of savings assumed in your proposals are sufficient to manage pressures and deal with the backlogs in social care, children's services and roads maintenance and contribute to your infrastructure fund.
- What assumptions you have made about the availability of existing councils' assets and reserves given that these are already being used to support investment, for example the City council's investment in the £4 bn programme of major regeneration and development.

We therefore reserve our comments on your proposals until you have set out a firm proposition. However, you will be aware that the City Council's position, confirmed by a motion to our full council, is that Oxford, as a city of national economic significance with very different social and economic characteristics from the rest of the County needs to retain its own governance. An area board or parish council would be insufficient to fully reflect the place making needs of the city.

A single county council unitary authority would be too large and remote, covering a population that would reach nearly 900,000 by 2031 if planned housing growth is delivered. Even at its current size it would be the third largest council in the country. The experience of Birmingham shows that unitary authorities of that scale can result in poor performance, inflexibility and a lack of focus on place with knock on cost to the local economy and local communities.

A large, predominantly rural unitary county council would lack the flexibility and understanding to deal with the issues in the city that are typical to inner city urban areas such as community cohesion, migration, long standing problems of child protection, trafficking and child sexual exploitation in the city.

Oxfordshire's economic geography is not defined by a single functional economic area but is multi-faceted. Oxford City is demonstrably the functional engine of the city region economy and a major contributor to a connected regional cluster that is world leading in science, technology and knowledge as part of the Oxford-Milton Keynes Cambridge corridor. West Oxfordshire is part of the Cotswolds and Gloucestershire tourist economy. The north of the County is part of the Midlands economy and Banbury has a travel to work area that extends into Northamptonshire. The south of the County is part of the Reading travel to work area, the Thames Valley IT cluster and links to Heathrow and west to the M4 corridor. The health economy operates over a wider area covering Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire as reflected in the NHS STP footprint. A county unitary would lack the agility to combine a real focus and understanding of different local economies with managing strategic issues of infrastructure and strategic planning.

We are strongly of the view that a combined authority with an elected mayor is a better solution for Oxfordshire. This would allow us to focus on the urgent and important priority of delivering our economic potential whilst protecting local decision making. We do not believe we should allow arguments about local government structures to distract us from the urgent need and the opportunity to secure the significant investment in infrastructure in Oxfordshire that is needed to tackle barriers to growth, enable business to thrive and to deliver our considerable economic potential. In a speech that he gave on 19th January, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government made it clear that Government remains committed to continuing with devolution, that it welcomes proposals from local areas and those areas that opt for a directly elected mayor will always be in line for the greatest degree of devolution.

The Combined Authority and devolution deal would avoid the considerable disruption and distraction of focus that would come from unnecessary reorganisation of local services that are highly performing. It would provide robust governance for devolution of new investment from government to the county, and drive joint working on strategic planning, transport, infrastructure and skills. It would also be able to drive forward a collective transformation and efficiency programme that could deliver greater savings than those estimated in your document.

We remain strongly supportive of the LEP's decision at the meeting in December which was agreed by all council leaders that our priority should be to focus on development proposal for a deal with government based on a mayoral combined authority. We agree with the LEP that we should not let that be derailed by pursuit of unitary ambitions which have no consensus of support. We therefore ask you to continue with the work we agreed to do jointly in developing our devolution deal proposals.



Councillor Bob Price
Leader



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Peter Clark,
Oxfordshire County Council

07 March 2017

David Hill,
South and Vale District Council

Dear David and Peter

Better Oxfordshire

I received the notification of your Better Oxfordshire proposals yesterday by letter from David.

The proposals are radically different to the One Oxfordshire suggested option for local government. For example suggestions to create a Town Council for the City, the idea that Council Tax equalization could be resourced by a large scale precept just in the City, the idea of service delegation to Town and Parish Councils on a wide scale, the increase in the number of Area Executives to make them much smaller than District area level, abandoning local plan reviews necessary to meet the housing totals agreed in the City Deal. Indeed David's letter makes it clear that you consider the new proposals a major departure from the original proposals.

In light of this, Oxford City Council regard the Better Oxfordshire proposals as a brand new proposition. I note South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse rejected the "One Oxfordshire" idea but now support the new Better Oxfordshire proposal because they regard it as significantly different and a new approach.

The proposals suggest that the functions of the city council would be split between six councils: a new town council which currently does not exist, four parish councils and the new unitary. Since these arrangements are fundamental to the entire proposition in terms of accountable governance for the city but also the financial assumptions underpinning the new unitary county council, we believe that these proposals need to be properly explained and clarified and that the City Council and the Parish councils affected have a right to be consulted prior to the proposals being submitted.

Your three authorities cannot take a sound decision following public law principles to decide on a bid without consulting us on the new proposal. It would strengthen the bid to government if more councils agreed a set of common proposals so time is needed for us to understand the impact of what you are proposing and work with you to see if agreement is possible.

We would formally ask you to give the City Council eight weeks to consider your 150 page document and give you our response. We have employed some advisors to assist us in providing a carefully considered analysis of the proposals.

We will shortly enter the purdah period for the County Council elections and it will be difficult for me to consult my council on the matter until after the elections without reporting on controversial matters on which candidates have competing views. This will hamper our ability to take a decision on the proposition before the end of the Purdah period.

We have commissioned some independent opinion polling from MORI and the emerging results show that the public do not feel they are well informed about the original proposals, do not support the proposal that district services should be run by the county and that they believe they should be properly informed about proposals before taking a view. We believe you are under a moral and legal obligation to consult the public on the new Better Oxfordshire proposals after the purdah period for the county council elections so that the public can have their say.

After a year of studies on the County Council's unitary option we are surprised there is no coherent set of proposals covering the City which is so economically and socially vital for the county's future. It is not credible to apply to the Secretary of State suggesting he approve a new Council until the arrangements for the City are known and firm costed proposals are made. The suggestion of a further study of the governance options for the city seems reasonable, although late in the day, but I hope you agree any proposals from the convention you suggest would need to be subject to public consultation and that no application for local government restructuring could be reasonably made to the Secretary of State until the outcomes of this is known. The council tax equalization proposals are dependent on the outcome of this convention so the Secretary of State would want certainty on the matter before considering the proposals.

In summary then, as a result of the clear and material changes to the original One Oxfordshire proposal, and the fact that under your proposed timetable for submission to the Secretary of State these matters would fall to be considered during the forthcoming "purdah" period (which would place substantial restrictions on this Council's ability properly to respond), we consider any submission of your "Better Oxfordshire" proposal to the Secretary of State prior to your receipt of our considered response to be premature, inappropriate and a clear breach of the principles of both Public Law and natural justice. I wanted to let you know that should you proceed with your immediate submission, the City Council reserves the right to include your failure to comply with this request in any submissions we subsequently make to the Secretary of State, and indeed in any potential legal action we may take in regard to this matter.

In discussion with government officials yesterday we were advised that they expect areas to try to reach a consensus on structures locally and agree joint proposals. We are happy to work with you on a partnership basis on structure options especially as they impact on the city in an attempt to reach agreement on a compromise for the County. We believe a devolution deal application could be progressed now based on a combined authority. The combined authority and the councils could then implement in future changes in the local government arrangements that are agreed by all. By splitting Councils into two opposing camps around these proposals there is a danger the Secretary of State will feel unable to agree any proposals on structure or devolution and Oxfordshire will be the loser in this.

Could you urgently confirm that no decision to submit your Better Oxfordshire bid will be taken prior to giving the City Council reasonable time to consider the document you have produced and no bid for change in arrangement for the City will be made until your suggested convention reports on options and the public have been consulted.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Sloman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Peter Sloman
Chief Executive

JAMES MILLS

Leader of the Council

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**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Ian Hudspeth
Leader
Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall
OXFORD
OX1 1ND

Our Ref: JM/MS

28 February 2017

Dear Ian

**West Oxfordshire District Council response to Oxfordshire County Council
“One Oxfordshire” proposals for a single unitary Council for Oxfordshire**

I do not believe that West Oxfordshire District Council has been formally invited to respond to the County Council’s ‘One Oxfordshire’ proposal. Nevertheless, we are taking this opportunity to respond on behalf of all the West Oxfordshire residents who have contacted us.

It is the strong view of this Council that there cannot be changes of the scale proposed without public support. There is an extremely high level of public opposition to the emerging ‘One Oxfordshire’ proposals and three of the council leaders, their Councils, and the majority of local MPs do not support these proposals.

This Council’s opposition is based upon a number of fundamental concerns about the proposal, which:-

- 1) represents a re-run of previous failed top down reorganisation attempts;
- 2) focuses on a single option with no consideration of any alternatives;
- 3) seeks to reorganise hierarchical structures rather than transform service delivery;
- 4) stifles innovation and agile working;
- 5) delivers little, if anything, in terms of true transformational change and in this respect is narrow and unambitious;
- 6) reduces local democracy and choice;
- 7) has little public support from our residents.

This Council believes that the future success of local government in Oxfordshire should be built around collaboration not control. Indeed there is some irony in the fact that you have published your proposals so soon after the Oxfordshire authorities have collectively concluded discussions which see Oxford City’s significant levels of unmet housing need being successfully planned for. Indeed we have also seen a step change in the local political thinking around a combined authority with elected mayor – the key elements for a strong devolution deal – with such a proposition being supported by all the Councils with the notable exception of the County Council.

28 February 2017

Ian Hudspeth

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Given the recent change in position of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council Leaders, who advise us that they have persuaded you to make fundamental changes to your proposal, it would be illogical for you to submit a bid to the Secretary of State to make fundamental and permanent changes to local government in Oxfordshire without proper consultation on these revised proposals.

We therefore ask that you confirm a coherent set of proposals, consult with us at an early stage, and work with all parties allowing a reasonable time for a response before considering any such submission to the Secretary of State. This consultation **must** include the local authorities affected by the changes both within Oxfordshire and those in neighbouring areas which are already partnering with the districts in shared service arrangements. This will ensure that any proposals are evaluated against realistic alternative options and allow us to identify how we can collectively deliver savings that are really meaningful for Oxfordshire taxpayers and are sustainable in the long term, based upon transformational change rather than just organisational change.

Furthermore, if we are being honest about building a new Oxfordshire model for the future, we must create a structure which stands the test of time. The current proposals are for an authority of a size already at the top end of government guidance and which within ten years of its inception will be significantly above those guidelines. It is clear from recent events that unitary authorities of the scale being considered by the County Council and its supporters run the risks of poor performance, inflexibility and a lack of focus on place with knock on costs to the local economy and local communities. I certainly do not want to be responsible for creating something that is so large it ceases to be agile and flexible but becomes monolithic and stagnant.

West Oxfordshire District Council remains of the view that a Combined Authority with an elected mayor is a better solution for Oxfordshire for at least the foreseeable future. We do not believe that we should allow arguments about local government structures to distract us from the clear and current opportunity to secure the significant investment in infrastructure in Oxfordshire that is urgently required in order to tackle barriers to growth, enable businesses to thrive and realise our considerable economic potential.

The Combined Authority and devolution deal would render unnecessary the considerable disruption and distraction of focus that would come from any reorganisation of district based services that are already performing to a high standard. It would provide robust governance to support the devolution of new levels of investment from government to the county, and drive joint working on strategic planning, transport, infrastructure and skills. It would also have the ability to drive forward a collective transformation and efficiency programme that could deliver greater savings than those estimated in your document.

Having regard to all of the above, and speaking on behalf of the whole of West Oxfordshire District Council in this regard, I would strongly urge the County Council to cease its work on One Oxfordshire, which clearly has little public support from our residents, and work together with us and other partners on a devolution deal. In the fullness of time and with the benefit of real experience of such a deal, we can assess the need for structural change, but that structural change of itself cannot be seen to be the solution to a problem that is as yet not clearly or fully defined.

In terms of evidence to support our proposition I include the outcome of our own public survey which has had an overwhelming response as set out below:-

Total Respondents	4,303
Total in favour of One Oxfordshire proposal	327
Total in favour of Councils working together rather than a single Council	3,967
% in favour of One Oxfordshire proposition	7.6%

In addition I could also cite the 180 plus phone calls I have had where members of the public have left their names and addresses in response to my letter. The response was unequivocal – all took time to call me and **all** were against the proposition of a single Unitary Council for Oxfordshire.

Furthermore, the survey comments, the contents of which we will share with the County Council and which we expect you to include with your survey evidence should you submit to the Secretary of State, are extremely powerful. These comments should be taken seriously by all local politicians as they are evidence of support for local decision making. Indeed 3419 people not only indicated support or otherwise but went on to explain why, and I think as local politicians we should take note of their views.

Whilst initially I did have some doubts about the cost of sending a letter to all residents, I now know it was absolutely the right thing to do – I have heard them loud and clear – have you?

Yours sincerely



JAMES MILLS
Leader of the Council

cc Peter Clark

