

CABINET – 14 MARCH 2017
Proposals for the Future Organisation of Local Government in
Oxfordshire - Performance Scrutiny Committee Chairman's report
to Cabinet

The Performance Scrutiny Committee discussed the Bid Document “Better Oxfordshire”, the Recommendations to Cabinet and the feedback from the “One Oxfordshire” consultation process.

The following were the main issues raised by Councillors:

- The Committee recognised that Better Oxfordshire is only the start of a journey and that many of the principles and details will necessarily be for the Joint Committee and Implementation Executive to consider. The Scrutiny Committee was keen to ensure that there was adequate county councillor representation on both these bodies, and again stressed the importance of community voice informing the approach that is taken.
- Members were keen that individuals can clearly see what the proposals mean in terms of cost and local democracy, and in terms of what might be lost as well as gained.
- The Chair and members praised officers for their work in developing the proposal, noting that the process had been very open to collaboration with members, stakeholder groups and individual residents.
- The Committee welcomed the fact that the proposal had been adopted by the Cabinet and Council of the Vale of White Horse.
- “Option 6” that emerged from the Grant Thornton report greatly improved the unitary proposal in recognising the need for more local empowerment.
- However, there was still a concern that more community involvement needs to be embedded in the structure – in the City Convention, the Area Boards and the Joint Committee work to ensure that the new authority is built up from community to implementation.
- This work must recognise that communities are not just determined by places but also by issues and cultures.
- It's not clear if budgets will be devolved proportionally or by a bidding system.
- It is being proposed that the new local council for Oxford has a precept. It must be clear that this is to pay for better services and that residents are not paying more for the same services.
- Having too many Area Executive Boards could dilute their effectiveness.
- There is already a problem with lack of diversity among councillors and the reduction in the number of councillors could make that worse.
- How will the Implementation Executive be balanced, politically and in terms of cabinet members or ‘backbenchers’?
- The City Convention should specifically include engagement with BME communities.
- The new council when elected may not include many experienced councillors and the unitary structure will be new to all, so training and member development will be important.
- There needs to be an awareness of the problems for areas on the political boundaries – both the county boundaries and divisions within the county.

- The new council needs to prioritise income generation.

Cabinet is asked to note the comments from the Performance Scrutiny Committee and in particular to ensure that there is significant community involvement in shaping the development of the Area Executive Board model.