



# **Oxfordshire County Council**

## **Equalities Impact Assessment**

'One Oxfordshire' LGR proposal'

22/10/2025

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## Section 1: Summary details

<b>Directorate and Service Area</b>	N/A
<b>What is being assessed</b> (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	'One Oxfordshire', Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposal to replace Oxfordshire's existing two-tier councils with a single county-wide unitary council. This EIA examines the proposal's potential impacts on equalities.
<b>Is this a new or existing function or policy?</b>	Yes
<b>Summary of assessment</b>  Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	<p>The One Oxfordshire proposal is a structural change intended to streamline services and improve efficiency across the county. There is no evidence of inherent bias or discrimination in the proposal's design, it does not single out or exclude any group. On the contrary, the intended service model (a single 'front door' for all residents) aims to provide consistent access for everyone county-wide. If implemented, One Oxfordshire could advance equality of opportunity by eliminating the current fragmentation of services, which is expected to benefit all communities including those with protected characteristics (for example, more cohesive planning of social care, housing, and other support).</p> <p>Crucially, this assessment has considered whether any group would be unfairly disadvantaged. No unfair disadvantage is anticipated provided that robust mitigations are in place during transition. The proposal does not alter eligibility or provision of services based on any protected characteristic; services will continue to be delivered on need. Some risks (e.g. temporary disruption during reorganisation, or perceptions of reduced local voice in rural areas) are identified, but these are practical issues not deliberate biases. With careful management (see mitigations in Section 3), such risks can be minimised. Overall, the proposal complies with the Public Sector Equality Duty, it seeks to foster equitable service access and does not introduce any form of unlawful discrimination. This EIA remains impartial and fact-based, given the politically sensitive context; it focuses solely on objective impacts against the Equality Act criteria, ensuring a neutral, balanced analysis.</p> <p>Conclusion (Section 1): One Oxfordshire is assessed as a neutral-to-positive proposal in equalities terms. It is large and potentially contentious, but from an equalities standpoint it neither biases nor unfairly disadvantages any protected</p>

	group. In fact, it offers opportunities to address existing inequalities (for example, by applying a county-wide strategy to tackle deprivation and improve access in underserved areas). Ongoing monitoring and mitigation will be important, but at this stage the proposal is deemed consistent with equalities duties and can proceed to detailed impact analysis for each group below.
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<b>Date of Assessment</b>	22/10/2025

## Section 2: Detail of proposal

<p><b>Context / Background</b></p> <p>Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.</p>	<p>Oxfordshire currently <b>operates a two-tier local government system</b>: Oxfordshire County Council plus five district councils (Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire). This structure has been in place for ~50 years. In recent years, multiple factors have driven the case for change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Financial Pressures</b> - Like many areas, Oxfordshire's councils face severe budget strain. Rising service demands (especially in adult and children's social care) and reduced central funding have led to forecasts of future financial shortfalls. Efficiency savings and transformation are needed to maintain services. The government's devolution agenda (White Paper 2024) has also signalled that moving to single-tier councils is a preferred solution to improve financial resilience and service delivery.</li> <li>• <b>Fragmentation of Services</b> - The two-tier setup is viewed as fragmented and inefficient, with overlapping responsibilities across county and districts. Key functions are split, e.g. the county manages social care and</li> </ul>
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	<p>highways, while districts handle housing and planning, leading to duplication, siloed decision-making and complexity for residents. All Oxfordshire councils ‘do their best’ for residents, but bureaucracy and split accountability can hinder strategic action on cross-cutting issues (for example, aligning housing development with social care or public health). The current system sometimes results in uneven service experiences depending on district boundaries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>National Policy Direction</b> - The UK Government has invited proposals for local government reorganisation in shire counties, aiming for single-tier (‘unitary’) structures that cover coherent economic areas. In Oxfordshire’s case, the entire county is seen as the sensible geography for one unitary. Government guidance indicates new councils should serve populations of ≈500k+ to be viable and efficient. Oxfordshire’s population (~725,000 in 2021, projected 760,000+ by 2025) fits well within this criterion, bolstering the case for a single county-wide council. </li> </ul> <p>Given the above, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has put forward the ‘One Oxfordshire’ proposal as a fresh start. The aim is to create a modern council structure that is simpler, financially sustainable, and better able to meet residents’ needs in the long term. This is seen not just as a structural change, but as an opportunity to improve outcomes (for example, by uniting efforts to tackle inequality, homelessness, climate action, etc., under one strategic body). The context for One Oxfordshire is also influenced by successful transitions elsewhere (e.g. Buckinghamshire’s move to a unitary in 2020) and the devolution deal discussions (a future Thames Valley Combined Authority), a single county unitary is presented as the best platform for both local service integration and engaging with regional devolution.</p>
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<p><b>Proposals</b></p> <p>Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.</p>	<p>One Oxfordshire entails abolishing the five district councils and the county council and establishing one new 'Oxfordshire Council' unitary authority for the whole county. In practical terms, this means all local government services, from social care and highways to housing, planning, waste collection, environmental health, libraries, etc., would be delivered by the single county-wide council instead of six separate councils. The new Council would be governed by one elected body of councillors (replacing the current county councillors and district councillors) and a single officer leadership team.</p> <p><b>Rationale / Why this option</b> - Through an options appraisal, One Oxfordshire was identified by Oxfordshire County Council as the preferred and most beneficial model for the county's future. Key reasons include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Streamlined, 'One-Stop' Services.</b> Residents and businesses will have one point of contact ('one front door') for all local government services. This simplifies access, no confusion over whether the county or district handles an issue. For example, currently a resident needing social care (county function) and a housing adaptation (district function) must deal with two councils; under One Oxfordshire, these related needs can be handled seamlessly together. Clear accountability is a benefit, a single Council is wholly responsible for service outcomes, making it easier for the public to understand and influence.</li> <li>• <b>Avoiding Service Disruption.</b> Crucially, One Oxfordshire maintains county-wide critical services intact. Services like adult social care, children's services, and firefighting are currently run by OCC for the whole county; this proposal keeps them under one roof, avoiding any break-up ('disaggregation') of these services. In contrast, splitting into multiple unitary areas would divide those county services between new authorities, risking disruption, higher costs, and inconsistent standards (a point highlighted by the government's criteria). One Oxfordshire is the only option that combines continuity of crucial services with an opportunity to redesign local delivery for the better.</li> <li>• <b>Financial Efficiency and Resilience.</b> By merging duplicative structures, the single council is projected to save over £30 million per year in operating costs, with net savings of ~£163 million over the first five years. (These savings arise from consolidating management, offices, contracts, IT systems, etc.) An independent analysis by PwC backs these figures. The new council would have a much larger tax base and budget, improving resilience to economic shocks and allowing strategic investment. Importantly, One Oxfordshire is estimated to be the fastest and least costly option to implement among the reorganisation choices, it involves a single transition rather than multiple new entities. Savings can be reinvested into front-line</li> </ul>
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	<p>services or initiatives to address inequalities, benefiting all communities. (Note: Implementation would incur one-off costs ~£22m, but these are outweighed by the recurring savings within a short payback period.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>Stronger Strategic Capacity.</b> A single Oxfordshire Council can plan at scale for the whole county's needs. This is vital for issues like housing, infrastructure and economic development that transcend district boundaries. For example, Oxfordshire's housing plans have struggled under fragmented governance (a joint countywide plan failed previously). One Oxfordshire would enable unified spatial planning to meet housing need across the county, potentially easing inequalities in access to affordable housing. It also creates a single strong voice to work with partners (NHS, Police, universities, neighbouring counties) and to lobby Government. This can unlock opportunities like devolution deals and investment, e.g. the proposal argues a single council will better support a future Thames Valley regional mayor and not create intra-county competition. </li> <li> <b>Devolution and Localism Together.</b> The model is designed to empower local communities while achieving strategic unity. One Oxfordshire plans to establish Area Committees and a new 'Communities' unit to ensure decision-making happens at the local level on local matters. Town and parish councils would be key partners (possibly taking on more responsibilities and funding in local service delivery). This two-tier within one organisation, a large unitary with devolved area structures, aims to balance the perceived loss of the district councils. Essentially, residents would still have local democratic forums (area committees, parish engagement) but backed by the resources and coherence of a single county council. Maintaining local identity and 'place' is a stated priority: no changes to ceremonial boundaries or postal addresses are proposed, and services would be delivered in communities as today, just managed by one council instead of six. </li> </ul> <p>In summary, the proposal is to create One Oxfordshire Council that is 'stronger, simpler, closer, and connected.' It consolidates governance to one layer, with promises of improved service equity (fair access for all residents), cost-effectiveness, and the capacity to tackle countywide challenges like inequality, housing, and climate change in a coordinated way.</p>
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<p><b>Evidence / Intelligence</b></p> <p>List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.</p>	<p>Formulation of One Oxfordshire has been supported by a range of evidence sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Independent Research &amp; Reviews.</b> The financial case rests on independent modeling by PwC. Likewise, projections for service demand (e.g. in social care) were informed by external experts such as Newton Europe. The proposal references lessons from comparable counties (Buckinghamshire, Dorset, etc., which recently transitioned to unitaries), assessing what worked well there and what pitfalls to avoid. This external evidence base lends credibility to claims about savings, feasibility, and risk mitigation.</li> <li>• <b>Engagement and Consultation.</b> Extensive stakeholder engagement underpins the case. Over Summer 2025, OCC ran a countywide engagement programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A statistically representative residents' survey (with ~1,200 respondents) covering all parts of Oxfordshire.</li> <li>○ An open public survey (1,300+ responses) and on-street interviews gathering wider public opinion.</li> <li>○ Deliberative research: focus groups (9 groups with 63 residents) and youth sounding boards (81 young people) to get qualitative insights.</li> <li>○ Targeted sessions with stakeholders, e.g. town and parish councils (318 local councils were invited), voluntary sector, business groups, MPs and public service partners.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Feedback from these channels indicated residents' priorities align with the aims of One Oxfordshire: people want 'a council that is cost-effective, with simpler services and easy access,' but also reassurance that local voices will continue to be heard in a larger setup. This directly shaped the proposal, confirming the importance of the 'one front door' approach to services, and prompting robust measures for localism (area committees, etc.) to address the concern about local voice. The engagement showed an appetite for change if it delivers tangible benefits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Data on Needs and Inequalities.</b> The proposal references Oxfordshire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and other research to illustrate current and future service needs. For instance, the JSNA highlights a growing and aging population (Oxfordshire's 65+ age group grew 48% from 2001–2021), which implies rising demand for adult social care, a challenge better met by a unified council pooling resource. It also notes pockets of deprivation and health inequality even in a relatively affluent county. These findings support</li> </ul>
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	<p>the argument that a single council could deploy county-wide initiatives (like the new Marmot Partnership on health inequality) more effectively than fragmented councils. Local service performance data also indicate that the county council has very low unit costs and strong outcomes in critical services (adult social care, children's services), the risk to these services would be lowest with the continuity of a single unitary.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consultation with Other Councils.</b> Although districts and OCC have differing visions, there has been technical collaboration. Data and perspectives have been shared in working groups, and regular meetings between chief executives and leaders occurred during the proposal development. This helped ensure all options were understood. Ultimately, OCC's proposal reflects a conviction (supported by evidence above) that one council best meets the government's tests and the public's needs in Oxfordshire.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Alternatives considered / rejected</b></p> <p>Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.</p>	<p>During development, OCC considered <b>three main options</b> against the government's criteria for reform:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Option 1: One Unitary Council for Oxfordshire</b>, (the chosen proposal, as described). On Oxfordshire County Council's existing boundaries</li> <li>2. <b>Option 2: Two Unitary Councils</b>, A north Oxfordshire council (created from the existing district councils of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire) and a Ridgeway Council (created from the existing district councils of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, and the unitary council of West Berkshire)</li> <li>3. <b>Option 3: Three Unitary Councils</b>, with a unitary city on expanded boundaries as well as northern and southern unitaries, including West Berkshire.</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Option 2 (Two Councils)</b>, This might have grouped some districts together (exact boundaries varied in ideas, e.g. City and Cherwell in one, and the southern districts in another). It was rejected because it scored lower on key criteria. Neither new council would meet the preferred population size (both would be under under 500k). This raises concerns about resilience and viability from the start. Financially, while some savings would occur, they'd be eroded by the need to duplicate county-level services. Some mitigations exists in using West Berkshire as an existing unitary. Disaggregating the county services into two parts would be costly and complex, introducing risks to service continuity (particularly for vulnerable groups reliant on countywide services). For these reasons, a two-council model was deemed suboptimal.</li> </ul>

- **Option 3 (Three Councils)**, This scored even lower. Three mini-unitaries would be below the 500k population guideline (approx. 200k–300k each). The fragmentation of services would be greatest here: not only splitting current county services three ways (with attendant cost and risk), but also potentially altering boundaries (one idea involved redrawing Oxford city separately, etc.), causing disruption. Financially, the savings case is highly sub optimal likely yielding limited or no net savings after transition costs. This option was therefore not pursued further.

**Why One Oxfordshire over the alternatives.** In summary, One Oxfordshire (Option 1) was found to:

- Best meet government requirements for a single tier covering the whole area.
- Offer the highest financial benefit, with a swift payback, whereas Options 2 and 3 had fewer reliable savings and high disaggregation costs.
- Avoid breaking up crucial countywide services (adult social care, children’s services, fire), avoiding the attendant risks of Options 2/3.
- Provide a coherent geography matching Oxfordshire’s functional economic area and identity (Options 2/3 would split the economy and potentially create competition between parts of the county).
- Be simplest to implement (single transition program vs. multiple) with lowest risk of service interruption during the changeover.

Alternatives were therefore set aside. The chosen proposal includes measures to mitigate the downsides sometimes associated with large unitaries (as noted, area committees for localism, service hubs, maintaining local ties) to combine the benefits of scale with the strengths of local focus. The emphasis is on ‘continuity plus positive reform’, keep what works in the current system (county services, local access points) and reform what doesn’t (duplication, fragmentation). This balanced approach is at the core of One Oxfordshire, and its anticipated impacts, especially on different community groups, are detailed next.



### **Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics**

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	☒	☒	☐	The age profile in Oxfordshire is diverse, the county has an aging population (20% of residents in rural districts are 65+ vs 12% in Oxford city), and areas with many young people (Oxford's student population makes its median age only 32). One Oxfordshire is expected to benefit older people by protecting and enhancing adult social care and health services. Under a single council, critical services for older adults (e.g. social care, home care, day services) will not be split or disrupted, the proposal explicitly avoids disaggregating these services. This stability is crucial because older residents rely heavily on such support. In fact,	To ensure older people benefit and do not experience any service gaps during transition, the implementation plan includes a 'disruption-free transition' commitment, meaning current care packages, contacts, and support channels will be maintained through the change. <b>The new council may consider retaining locality teams for social care so that on Day 1, an elderly resident still deals with the same social worker or support team as before (just under a new employer).</b> For rural areas, Area Committees and possibly local area boards will be set up early, to give local representatives (including those advocating for older residents) a forum to	Programme Transition Lead & Adult Services Director, OCC	throughout transition 2025–2028, with post-vesting day review of any reported access issues from elderly or youth groups.)

				<p>maintaining one county-wide adults' service prevents the major risk of fragmentation that could occur under multiple smaller councils (which could have led to uneven care standards or confusion). A unified authority can also more effectively join up services that older people use, for example, integrating OCC's adult social care with district-run housing adaptations and community transport, which should improve outcomes for older residents (currently these are handled separately).</p> <p>There is a potential concern that a larger council might feel more distant for some elderly residents, especially in rural villages, e.g. fearing loss of the familiar local district office or slower response. However, mitigations are built-in: the new council plans local area offices and Area Committees</p>	<p>influence decisions. The council also has an age-friendly initiative through its public health and communities' strategies (e.g. 'community hubs' for multi-generational activities) which the unitary can expand. In summary, by carefully managing the changeover and investing savings into community-level services, the needs of both older and younger residents will be safeguarded. No further specific actions are required beyond those already planned (e.g. communications to elderly residents about where to get help, continuity of care assurances), but continuous monitoring is advised.</p>		
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				<p>to retain a presence in communities. Customer access points (like libraries or council hubs) will remain distributed, so an elderly person should still be able to access face-to-face support nearby. The council's digital services will also be unified and made user-friendly for those who prefer online access. By bringing together information from multiple councils, it may become easier for older people (and their families) to navigate one system rather than several. The proposal also emphasises working closely with town/parish councils and the voluntary sector in service delivery, this local partnership approach will help ensure older residents in rural communities are not left isolated or unheard.</p> <p>For younger people and children, the impact is likewise neutral or slightly positive. Children's social</p>			
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				<p>care and youth services (currently county-run) would continue seamlessly, avoiding any break-up of teams that support vulnerable children.</p> <p>Education services (school place planning, SEN support) remain unified, potentially benefiting from closer links to housing and community services now under the same council. The Marmot principles adopted by OCC include 'Give every child the best start in life', a single council can align early years support, public health and family services across the county to further this goal.</p> <p>There is no aspect of the proposal that would negatively treat people due to age. Service delivery will continue to be needs-based, and the large council's strategic focus on prevention (as described in the case for change) could particularly help both ends of the age</p>			
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				spectrum, e.g. projects to reduce isolation among the elderly, and better opportunities for youth countywide.			
Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Disability	☒	☒	☐	<p>Around 99,000 people in Oxfordshire have a disability (per Census 2021, including physical, mental, and sensory disabilities).</p> <p>Ensuring their needs are met is a vital part of this proposal. Overall, disabled individuals should not experience any reduction in support, on the contrary, they could see improvements through more integrated services. For instance, currently someone with a disability might receive social care from the county council, housing support (such as Disabled Facilities Grants for home adaptations)</p>	<p>The implementation should involve disability advocacy groups in design of the new processes, to ensure nothing is inadvertently made less accessible (e.g. new council website, contact centre, physical offices should all meet accessibility standards from the outset).</p> <p>OCC already has an accessible website and does Equality Impact Assessments for major changes, this culture will continue. The EIA finds no inherent negative impact on disabled people, but to solidify positive outcomes the new council</p>	Adult Social Care & Community Services leads	Design phase 2025-27 ensure all customer pathways are accessible, review post-2028).

			<p>from a district council, and use district-run leisure facilities with concession schemes.</p> <p>Under One Oxfordshire, these functions would be coordinated within one authority, making it easier to deliver a holistic package of support. The proposal explicitly notes that keeping services like adult social care and Special Educational Needs (SEN) services intact is a benefit, avoiding the disaggregation that could 'increase costs and lower service standards' for these critical areas. This continuity is a positive for people with disabilities who rely on consistent care, therapy, or specialist education support.</p> <p>Importantly, the new council will also inherit and continue the county's commitments to accessibility and inclusion. Oxfordshire CC has been working on improving digital</p>	<p>could streamline assessment processes (for instance, explore a single assessment that covers social care needs and housing needs together).</p> <p>This would reduce bureaucratic burden on individuals with disabilities. Also, the Council should maintain the existing Joint Commissioning approach with the NHS for services like Learning Disability support, this joint working can be enhanced when there is one local authority instead of six.</p> <p>One Oxfordshire can be beneficial for people with disabilities. All planned mitigations (maintaining service continuity, engaging users) are in place; no significant additional actions are needed beyond monitoring.</p>		
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				<p>accessibility, building access, and rolling out tools for people with disabilities (for example, the 'Inclusive Service Delivery' strategy under the Including Everyone framework).</p> <p>These efforts will carry on uninterrupted, now applied countywide with potentially more resources. There is no indication of any negative impact such as loss of eligibility or reduction in provisions for disabled residents, the merger does not change service criteria. If anything, a unified approach may make it easier to address gaps. For example, consistent Blue Badge parking enforcement policy across the county, or a single disability register for planning services, could emerge as benefits.</p> <p>One area to watch is how the new council manages community-based support</p>			
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				networks (currently, some districts fund local disability charities or run accessible recreation programs). These need to be preserved or unified so that people do not lose local support. Given the financial savings projected, the Council should be able to continue such support and possibly target it better using a county-wide view of needs (ensuring all parts of Oxfordshire have equitable access, not dependent on district budget disparities).			
Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Gender Reassignment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This refers to people who are transgender or non-binary. Oxfordshire has a relatively small but notable trans/non-binary community, about 0.6% of residents identify with a gender different from birth sex (slightly above the	Given neutrality, the main mitigation is to continue engagement and inclusive practices. The council should ensure its public consultation and communication recognises trans and non-binary voices (for example,	EDI Lead	ongoing

			<p>national average), and Oxford City is known to have one of the largest trans and non-binary populations outside London.</p> <p>The One Oxfordshire proposal is not expected to have any direct specific impact (positive or negative) on this group, as it does not alter personal identity documents or gender-related services. The council's duties toward trans residents (e.g. providing inclusive services, tackling any discrimination) remain unchanged.</p> <p>One potential indirect positive is that a single council can adopt uniform inclusive policies and staff training across the whole county. Currently, OCC and the districts may have slightly different approaches to LGBTQ+ inclusion (though all follow Equality Act requirements).</p>	<p>using the appropriate language, providing the option for people to identify as non-binary in surveys, etc., which OCC already does). There should also be a focus on supporting LGBTQ+ youth, e.g. ensuring youth services and schools remain attentive to gender identity issues.</p> <p>The existing LGBTQ+ employee network at OCC can be expanded to all staff of the new council, which helps maintain an internal culture of inclusion that translates into better service for the community.</p> <p>In summary, no adverse impact on gender reassignment is identified. The new council's policies will uphold the rights and dignity of trans individuals just as the current councils do.</p>		
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				<p>With One Oxfordshire, there is an opportunity to adopt the Equality &amp; Diversity framework, OCC's 'Including Everyone' framework 2025–2029 emphasises tackling discrimination and specifically mentions commitments like achieving the Race Equality Code and being a Council of Sanctuary for vulnerable migrants. While these are broader, they create an environment of inclusion beneficial to all protected groups, including trans people.</p> <p>The new council can ensure all front-line staff (from libraries to housing officers) get awareness training about transgender and non-binary residents' needs, building on existing best practice. This consistency might be an improvement if any district had less developed training before.</p>			
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Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Marriage and civil partnership status does not receive differential service (except in employment rights, which the council will uphold for its staff). For the public, the main related service is the Registration Service (for marriages, civil partnerships). Currently, Oxfordshire County Council already manages births, deaths, and marriages registration countywide, this will continue under the unitary.</p> <p>No change in how marriages or civil partnerships are registered or recognised will occur; all legal rights remain the same. The workload and offices of the Registration Service simply move into the new council structure untouched.</p>	<p>None needed specific to this characteristic. The Registration service should ensure continuity (e.g. existing bookings for weddings at council-run venues will be honoured without interruption by the change in governance). Communication to residents might clarify that 'Oxfordshire Council' will be the authority issuing marriage certificates instead of OCC, but legally this is a seamless transition.</p> <p>Council policies (for example, employee benefits for spouses/partners) will carry over and likely be standardised at the best level across the new organisation.</p>	N/A	Monitored as part of general service continuity

				There is no indication that any group of people based on marital status would be advantaged or disadvantaged by the council reorganisation. Married people, single people, those in civil partnerships or divorced, all would continue to access services equitably. The Census data shows about 47% of Oxfordshire households are married couples (including 0.8% same-sex married/civil partners). Those proportions are not expected to shift due to this proposal.			
<b>Protected Characteristic</b>	<b>No Impact</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>	<b>Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts</b>	<b>Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)</b>	<b>Timescale and monitoring arrangements</b>
<b>Pregnancy &amp; Maternity</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Services touching on pregnancy and new parents include maternity healthcare (NHS-led), but also council services like antenatal classes in children's centres,	Ensure that information for new parents (e.g. how to register a birth, how to access support) is clearly consolidated under the new council, but this is a	N/A	To be reviewed by Registration/ Children's Services post-reorg.



			<p>health visiting (commissioned by public health), family support and housing for expectant mothers, etc. These will not be negatively impacted by the structural change.</p> <p>Oxfordshire's general fertility rate is slightly below national average (about 51 births per 1,000 women) and in 2021 there were ~7,380 births in the county. The proposal does not change eligibility or access to any support for pregnant women or parents of infants.</p> <p>In fact, having a single council overseeing both children's services and housing could help families who need support, for instance, a pregnant woman facing homelessness currently might navigate between district housing and county social services; under one council, assistance can be more coordinated. The</p>	<p>straightforward communications task. The council's public health function, which includes maternal health improvement programs, will remain intact and likely get a stronger platform in one authority.</p> <p>Perhaps one mitigation is to keep maternity voices included in area forums, e.g. invite local mother and baby groups or use parent forums to get feedback during transition, to catch any unforeseen hiccups (like if a particular baby group was district-run, making sure it continues). There appear to be no negative impacts, so no major mitigation required beyond maintaining service levels.</p>		
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				<p>council already has initiatives for early help (through Children &amp; Family Centres) which will continue uniformly.</p> <p>No adverse impact is foreseen on maternity leave or related employment rights within the council, staff who are pregnant or on maternity leave will transfer to the new council with protected terms (TUPE laws apply). For service users, things like free childcare entitlements, maternity disability adaptations, etc., are governed by national policy and remain unaffected.</p>			
Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Race	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Oxfordshire's population is ethnically diverse in some areas and less so in others. Overall, nearly 1 in 4 residents (23%) are from an ethnic minority background</p>	<p>The new council should continue targeted engagement with ethnic minority communities. For instance, maintain advisory groups or forums that existed</p>	<p>EDI Lead, Engagement Team</p>	<p>during transition communications and ongoing in new council's EDI strategy.</p>

			<p>(not White-British). Oxford City is ~47% non-White-British, whereas some rural districts are over 90% White-British. Key point: the council reorganisation does not alter any person's ethnic background or how they are treated by law; it can, however, influence how well the council addresses racial inequalities.</p> <p>There is no indication of any negative impact such as reduced access for any ethnic group. All residents, regardless of ethnicity, will come under the new council's single set of services and policies, which will be designed to be inclusive.</p> <p>In fact, One Oxfordshire could help standardise best practices county-wide. For example, if one district had particularly effective outreach to Gypsy, Roma &amp; Traveller communities and another did</p>	<p>(like Oxford City's migrant communities forum or similar initiatives) at the county level.</p> <p>Providing translated information about the changes (in common community languages like Polish, Urdu, Portuguese, noting ~9% of residents speak English as second language) is a simple communication mitigation to ensure no one is left confused by the transition.</p> <p>Also, monitoring service uptake by ethnicity after the reorg will be important to ensure that previously underserved groups are not slipping through cracks.</p> <p>In employment and service design, applying an anti-racism lens (the Council has committed to be an anti-racist organisation) will help guard against bias. There is no evidence the reorg would cause bias, but maintaining training and accountability</p>		
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				<p>not, the new council can adopt that approach across the board. As a single employer, the council can strengthen its diversity in staffing (aiming for workforce representation of global majority/racialised communities at all levels).</p> <p>The Including Everyone framework highlights that the County Council is working towards Race Equality Code accreditation, this commitment could extend to the new Council potentially improving how services are delivered to minority ethnic residents (through cultural awareness, language support, etc.).</p> <p>Some racial disparities exist in Oxfordshire's outcomes (for instance, higher proportions of ethnic minorities in Oxford experiencing poverty or lower access to services). A unitary council can address these</p>	<p>(e.g. continue unconscious bias training for staff, use Equality Impact Assessments for new policies) will mitigate any subtle negative trends.</p> <p>Overall, the impact on racial groups is expected to be neutral or even positive through improved equity strategies.</p>		
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				<p>more strategically, e.g. targeting deprived multi-ethnic neighbourhoods with coordinated interventions (housing, education, public health all together).</p> <p>The proposal explicitly mentions tackling 'deep inequalities across the county', including those masked by overall affluence. The Marmot partnership and Local Policy Lab are tools the new council will use to reduce inequalities in health and opportunity for ethnic minorities. This suggests a positive intent.</p> <p>There is a risk worth noting: if there were any distrust or lack of engagement from minority communities due to changes in governance (for example, new council might need to rebuild relationships that district community workers had), it must be managed.</p>			
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				The EIA does not foresee this as a systemic issue, but it's important that the new council visibly continues support for initiatives like Oxford's Inclusive Communities work, global majority/racialised community groups, etc., so that those communities feel equally valued under the new setup.			
Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Sex	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This considers impacts on men and women. The population of Oxfordshire is roughly half male, half female (50.1% female, 49.9% male). The council's services are largely gender-neutral in provision (apart from specific initiatives like women's refuges for domestic abuse survivors, which will continue).	Ensure continuity and strengthening of gender-specific programs: e.g. the new council should maintain Oxfordshire's commitments as a White Ribbon authority (assuming OCC/districts have such commitments against violence to women) and continue supporting women's centres, etc., as well as support initiatives for	N/A	N/A

				<p>The reorganisation does not alter any rights or access based on sex. Both women and men should see no change in how they receive services like libraries, waste collection, social care, etc. One possible positive is that a single council may streamline initiatives that benefit a particular gender group, e.g. domestic abuse services (currently county council handles support and districts handle housing for survivors) could be unified for a more cohesive response.</p> <p>This would benefit predominantly women (who are most domestic abuse victims) but also male victims who will have one system to approach. Similarly, things like support for women's health or men's health via public health could see more consistent rollout across all areas.</p>	<p>men (like men's mental health projects, father's parenting groups, etc.). There is no direct negative impact to mitigate but being vigilant that service redesign post-merger does not inadvertently overlook gender differences is key.</p> <p>For example, if community engagement structures change, make sure women's groups (WI, mother toddler groups) and men's sheds or similar have equal voice.</p> <p>In employment, the council should monitor any changes: ensure female staff (who may form a larger portion of the workforce in services like care) are treated fairly through reorganisation. The proposal already notes the need to engage and retain staff through the change; this includes both men and women. With these considerations in place, we</p>		
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				<p>It's important to note that no job losses or service cuts are dictated specifically in areas that would disproportionately affect one gender. For instance, if there were a reduction in a service primarily used by women (like certain childcare programs), that could be negative, but nothing of that sort is in the proposal, services are expected to continue and potentially improve through efficiencies.</p> <p>Politically, one could observe that combining councils will reduce the overall number of councillors. Currently, across 6 councils there is a certain gender makeup; in the new single council, the representation could change.</p> <p>This is speculative, but worth ensuring that the new council's elections encourage diverse representation. This is more of a democratic consideration than a service</p>	foresee a neutral impact on sex.		
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				impact, and the election process will be governed by the usual rules (and is outside the scope of this EIA).			
Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Sexual Orientation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Approximately 3.4% of Oxfordshire residents identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB+) in the 2021 Census, though the true figure may be higher due to non-disclosure. The One Oxfordshire proposal does not negatively affect residents based on sexual orientation. All services are provided regardless of sexual orientation, and that will remain so.</p> <p>As with gender reassignment, the impact here is more about ensuring continued inclusion. The new council can champion</p>	<p>Maintain visible support for LGBTQ+ communities as a single council, to signal continuity. E.g., if multiple councils currently mark Pride Month, the new council must do the same, so no one feels the loss of an ally. Internally, policies like supporting staff networks for LGBTQ+ employees should continue.</p> <p>Externally, the council should continue diversity training so that front-line staff provide inclusive service to all residents (for example, not assuming gender of partners, etc.).</p>	EDI Lead/ HR/ Policy	by vesting day when policies merge.

				county-wide LGBTQ+ inclusion (for instance, supporting Pride events in Oxford and perhaps expanding engagement to towns across the county). If anything, a unified council might allocate more consistent support to LGBTQ+ community groups which previously might have only been funded by one or two district councils. There is no evidence that any council-run service specifically for LGB or heterosexual people will change, services such as sexual health clinics are NHS but commissioned jointly with OCC Public Health, and will remain coordinated	There is no direct adverse impact to mitigate beyond these ongoing good practices. New council to adopt existing equality policies from OCC and districts that protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation		
Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Religion or Belief	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oxfordshire residents have various faiths, 47% Christian, ~3% Muslim, ~1% Hindu,	Ensure the new council continues interfaith engagement. OCC has, for	EDI Lead/ Policy	ongoing

				<p>etc., and 37% no religion (2011 data, similar proportions in 2021). The council reorganisation is secular in nature and does not affect freedom of religion. People of all religions will continue to receive services equitably. If anything, one council might better coordinate with faith groups on community projects (for instance, working with churches, mosques, etc. on social initiatives could be streamlined under one authority rather than separate approaches by district and county).</p> <p>There are no policies in the proposal that touch on religious practices (like planning permission for places of worship will follow the same planning rules, just under one planning authority). The only minor consideration: currently some district councils have civic traditions tied to certain</p>	<p>example, connections through its Prevent and cohesion work with religious leaders. This should be maintained so faith communities feel represented. Practical accommodations (e.g. prayer rooms in public buildings, or scheduling meetings around major religious holidays) should continue. But no negative impact is identified, so mitigation is simply ongoing inclusion.</p>		
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				religious dates (like perhaps a civic service); the new council will establish its own civic traditions but that has negligible impact on the public.			
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### Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>One Oxfordshire will not change the presence of services in rural areas, for example, libraries, fire stations, clinics in market towns will remain. It may benefit rural residents by coordinating improvements across the whole rural area rather than by district. For instance, the new council could develop a comprehensive strategy for rural transport links or digital connectivity using the combined resources of county and district.</p> <p>Rural communities sometimes fear that a large, centralised authority could overlook them in favour of urban centres. The proposal recognises this and explicitly commits to 'bringing decision making closer to</p>	<p>Maintaining localism is the key mitigation. The proposal of creating Area Committees for different parts of the county will mitigate the risk of rural communities feeling removed from decision-making. These committees can focus on local priorities, e.g. a cluster of villages can raise issues specific to them.</p> <p>Additionally, the new council may wish to instate locality-based officers (community liaison) who understand rural community needs, an approach OCC already uses in some services. Ensuring that the savings from reorg do not disproportionately come from closures of rural facilities is vital, current plans are to keep service delivery points as-is initially, so no</p>		

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				<p>communities' through area committees and empowering town/parish councils. With these structures, rural voices (parish councillors, local community groups) should have a formal channel into the new council, arguably stronger than under the two-tier system where influence might have been fragmented.</p> <p>From an equalities perspective, rurality itself is not a protected characteristic, but rural isolation can exacerbate disadvantage (e.g. accessing care or employment). The new council's duty is to ensure equitable service delivery so that rural residents get a fair share of attention.</p> <p>Given OCC already covered the whole rural area for many services, continuity is assured</p>	<p>village libraries or rural tip sites should close purely due to reorganisation.</p> <p>The data shows rural areas have poorer physical access to services (85 small areas in Oxon are in the worst 10% nationally for access to key services by distance); one council can target these through innovative solutions (mobile services, digital offers).</p> <p>Effective communication will also mitigate apprehension: rural residents should be informed how to contact the new council (likely the same phone numbers/online portals they used for OCC and districts, just unified).</p> <p>Emphasising that local councillors will represent divisions that are often rural</p>		

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				for those services. District-level rural programs (like specific rural grants or community bus services) would be absorbed into the unitary, it will be important that these are not lost. However, the amalgamation of budgets could even allow more efficient support for rural initiatives, eliminating duplication	in nature, and that parishes remain intact, helps reassure continuity of local democratic input. Overall, with these mitigations, no negative impact on rural communities is expected.  Instead, the outcome should be neutral or slightly positive if one council can deliver more consistent support to rural areas (for example, applying successful pilots in one district to all rural areas countywide).		
<b>Armed Forces</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	One Oxfordshire will inherit OCC's lead role in the Armed Forces Covenant for the county. Currently, both county and districts have Covenant commitments (e.g. each district may have an Armed Forces champion councillor,	The new council should continue the Armed Forces Covenant partnership work, with continuity of a county-wide Civil-Military Partnership Board. They should ensure representation from military base	Policy Team	within first year of new council

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				<p>and OCC coordinates countywide support).</p> <p>Under a single council, this support can be unified, one elected Armed Forces Champion, one point of contact for forces queries, which might simplify things for service members and families. There should be no break in services for armed forces community.</p> <p>For instance, support for veteran housing, today, a veteran might approach a district housing authority for social housing and OCC for adult care; with one council, those processes link up more directly.</p> <p>The distinct nature of military life (frequent moves, schooling needs, healthcare, etc.) means the new council must</p>	<p>commanders in community engagement structures.</p> <p>A practical action is to re-issue the Covenant under the new council's name promptly, to show commitment hasn't changed. Also, maintain specialist staff roles, such as an Armed Forces Liaison Officer, to help service families navigate council services. By keeping these in place, forces personnel and families should experience seamless support.</p> <p>In summary, the impact is neutral, no loss of service or additional barriers. The cohesive approach could even be beneficial by having one consistent policy (for example, some districts may have slightly different council tax reliefs for forces, one</p>		



Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				remain sensitive to the community. But since OCC already covers education admissions (important for forces children) and healthcare liaison, continuity is strong. We do not anticipate any negative impact, the Armed Forces community will be treated as any other residents, with awareness of their Covenant rights (e.g. priority in school admissions, housing allocations where applicable) continuing under a single set of policies.	council can simplify and apply best practice for all)		
<b>Carers</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Under One Oxfordshire, the support to carers (which is largely through adult social care and children's services for young carers) remains under the same organisation, no structural change in roles.	The new council should continue the existing Carers Strategy work. OCC has a carers support team and contracts with charities (like Carers Oxfordshire), those will remain in place and just be managed by the new	Adult Social Care, Carers Lead	at point of transition communications

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				<p>It may even simplify things: currently a carer might interact with county council for a Carer's Assessment and with district for say a housing issue; one council can handle both aspects in a joined-up way. The proposal emphasises strengthening social care, which indirectly benefits carers by ensuring the people they care for get consistent support. There is no anticipated negative effect on carers, eligibility and rights (from the Care Act) remain.</p> <p>Potential positives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unified data might help identify and support 'hidden' carers across the county. Also, a single council can pool budgets to possibly enhance respite services or carers'</li> </ul>	<p>council. It will be important to communicate to carers that all contact points remain (e.g. the Carers Helpline number stays active).</p> <p>No disruption in services like respite bookings should occur; this is ensured by the commitment to a 'safe and legal Day 1' for all social care operations.</p> <p>Since carers are by nature often stretched thin, the council must avoid any confusion for them during transition, clear letters or public info can reassure that 'you will continue to get support as usual; the name on the letterhead might change to Oxfordshire Council, but phone numbers and staff contacts remain consistent.' This will mitigate</p>		

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				breaks. If any districts had local carer support grants, those could be merged with county's carers support budget to create a larger, countywide program (ensuring equitable access for carers in all areas)	any anxiety among the carer community.		
<b>Areas of deprivation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The One Oxfordshire proposal explicitly aims to tackle inequalities and 'level up' outcomes across the county. By having one council, it can direct resources to deprived areas without bureaucratic hindrance.</p> <p>For example, previously, district councils controlled certain regeneration funds for their areas; a single council could take a countywide view</p>	<p>The new council should develop a targeted plan for deprived communities, building on existing district regeneration plans. For example, if Oxford City had a plan for Barton or Blackbird Leys regeneration, the new council needs to adopt and continue it.</p> <p>The advantage is they can combine it with county transport or education</p>	Public Health & Communities, OCC;	ongoing, with review of indices post-implementation to gauge progress.)

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				<p>and ensure that the most deprived wards (wherever they are) get priority in investment. The foreword of the proposal and the Marmot commitment underscore that addressing socio-economic disadvantage is a core objective, 'provide an equitable distribution of support to our most vulnerable residents'.</p> <p>This indicates a likely positive impact for deprived areas: more coherent anti-poverty strategies (across housing, education, skills, public health), and potential reinvestment of efficiency savings into preventive services in those communities.</p> <p>Also, one council can simplify customer service for those facing hardship. For instance, currently a resident in poverty</p>	<p>projects in that area for a bigger impact. Ensuring community involvement (resident associations, etc.) in shaping interventions will mitigate any sense of disengagement.</p> <p>Additionally, continuing to monitor socio-economic data (as OCC does via the JSNA and insight reports) will help the unitary direct funding appropriately. The proposal mentions leveraging the Local Policy Lab with universities to address inequalities, following through on that will provide evidence-led actions for deprived areas.</p> <p>The Council's adoption of the socio-economic duty (voluntarily, via Including Everyone framework) means it will consider poorer groups</p>		

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				<p>might have to apply to a district for housing benefit/council tax support and to the county for a welfare assistance grant; with a single entity, there could be a one-stop application for financial help.</p> <p>There is no negative impact foreseen on deprived areas, services there (like community centres, advice centres, etc.) will continue, and the new council will be politically incentivised to show it's improving outcomes in those areas.</p> <p>However, one risk might be if a deprived area feels that losing its district council means losing its 'champion.' Mitigation through area committees (which would cover those urban areas</p>	<p>in decisions. All this indicates a systemic positive approach.</p> <p>In practical terms, no mitigation needed, because impact is positive. The main 'mitigation' is to keep the focus: do not let the impetus fade amidst structural change, i.e. ring-fence some of the savings to invest in prevention programs in deprived communities (this is a policy choice outside the EIA but relevant to outcomes)</p>		

<b>Additional community impacts</b>	<b>No Impact</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Description of impact</b>	<b>Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts</b>	<b>Action owner</b> (* Job Title, Organisation)	<b>Timescale and monitoring arrangements</b>
				specifically) can ensure local advocacy remains.			



### **Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Wider Impacts**



Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (* Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<p>The reorganisation offers opportunities for staff but also brings challenges. Overall, all employees across the six existing councils will transition to the new unitary council, ensuring job continuity in the immediate term. However, merging organisations of this scale inevitably means some duplicate roles (especially senior management and back-office positions) will become unnecessary over time to achieve the efficiency savings promised.</p> <p>This creates a potential negative impact for those staff at risk of redundancy. On the positive side, a single large council can provide a more unified career structure, clearer progression pathways, and the chance to work in a more integrated environment, with shared values and culture. The proposal explicitly states that OCC will 'work with Oxfordshire employees to develop the culture, values</p>	<p>The council has committed to a 'disruption-free transition' for both services and staff. In practice, this means comprehensive HR planning and support for employees. Key mitigation measures include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early in the transition, the council will establish an HR workstream (as noted in the transition plan) to map out the new staffing structure and inform people how and when changes will occur.</li> <li>• Transparent communication about which posts might be at risk and what the selection process is will help reduce rumour and stress. Staff and unions will be consulted extensively; trade union engagement is a legal requirement,</li> </ul>	HR and Culture Change/ HR lead for LGR	Ongoing from decision through 2028, with regular pulse surveys and union meetings to monitor workforce well-being

				<p>and identities of the new council(s)'. This indicates a strong commitment to engage staff in shaping the new organisation, which can boost morale and a sense of ownership.</p> <p>Under One Oxfordshire, approximately 8,000–10,000 staff (those currently employed by the county and five districts) will come together into one workforce. From Day 1 (vesting day) all staff will be legally transferred to the new Oxfordshire Council, preserving their existing terms and conditions (via TUPE or equivalent staff transfer protections). This means in the short term no one automatically loses their job or suffers a change in pay due to reorganisation alone. The new council must be 'safe and legal from day one', so all critical posts will be in place to maintain services.</p>	<p>and OCC has positive relations with unions like Unison, who will no doubt be involved in protecting staff interests (indeed, Unison nationally urges that no compulsory redundancies happen due to LGR).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council will seek to bring staff together into a single council and where redundancies are needed at the point of transition or after vesting day, organisational change policies will apply. absorb staff where possible</li> <li>• A positive mitigation is the plan to actively 'develop the culture' with staff. The new council will run</li> </ul>		
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			<p>Over the medium term, as the council consolidates, it will review structure for efficiency. The business case assumes a significant portion of the £30m annual savings comes from reducing duplication in management, administration, and support functions. For example, instead of six separate HR teams, IT teams, finance teams, etc., the unitary will have one of each.</p> <p>Similarly, one Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team will replace the six that exist now. This implies some posts will be deleted. The exact number is not in the proposal, mostly at management or corporate levels, phased out through restructuring and natural attrition. While front-line service jobs (like social workers, planners, customer service staff, bin collectors, etc.) are expected to be retained to continue service delivery, even they will experience change in</p>	<p>engagement workshops, joint team building across former organisations, and training on the new values. Change management programmes (often called 'Organisation Development') are expected to help staff adapt.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring of attrition by protected groups will help the new council in understanding if there have been any unintentional negative effects from its actions. Consistent and regular monitoring of equalities will be critical to ensuring that transition to vesting and beyond will be as equitable and fair as possible.</li> </ul>		
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				<p>reporting lines and possibly location or team adjustments. [</p> <p>For staff, negative impacts include uncertainty and anxiety during the transition period. Change of employer and restructuring can affect morale, especially if communication is poor or if individuals fear redundancy. It's crucial to manage this carefully to avoid loss of skilled personnel (a risk if people leave due to insecurity).</p> <p>There may also be practical challenges: aligning different pay scales and HR policies from six councils into one could be complex. Some staff might face changes in work base or team, for example, a district housing officer may find themselves in a larger county-wide housing service. Differences in organisational culture (county vs districts) will need reconciliation; without</p>			
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				<p>care, this could lead to friction or 'us vs them' feelings.</p> <p>On the positive side, One Oxfordshire can offer a stronger employment proposition in the long run. A bigger authority can provide more varied internal opportunities; employees can move or be promoted across a broader range of roles without leaving the organisation. Professional development might improve with unified training budgets and peer support across former council boundaries.</p> <p>A single employer for the county could also standardise benefits to the best level currently offered (for instance, if one council had a particularly good flexible working scheme or family leave policy, the new council may adopt it for all staff). The proposal indicates an intention to 'embed a values-based culture, where employees</p>			
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				<p>work together effectively and are empowered to make decisions', suggesting that the new council will try to take the best aspects of each predecessor's culture to create an improved working environment. Additionally, by eliminating duplication, remaining staff may have more resources to do their jobs (e.g. one well-resourced IT system instead of multiple outdated ones, etc.), which can increase job satisfaction.</p>			
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Other Council Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Under the two-tier system, various services were split between county and district councils. One Oxfordshire brings them together. For example, currently the County handles highways while districts handle parking enforcement; the County handles social care while districts handle housing; public health is county, leisure services are district, etc.</p> <p>In the new council, these related services will sit under one management structure and one political leadership. This holistic governance is expected to improve strategic coordination and remove the 'silo effect' that sometimes impeded service effectiveness.</p> <p>As the proposal notes, only a single council 'joins up ... housing and licensing with adults and children's services, trading standards and transport in a single council for</p>	<p>Ensuring that the impact on services stays positive requires meticulous planning and continuous oversight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For each service area, a continuity plan should be drawn up. This means identifying key tasks, deadlines, and responsible personnel during the transition. For instance, finance teams will ensure that supplier payments and benefit disbursements occur without interruption on changeover of bank accounts, etc. A 'safe and legal Day 1' audit will be performed to verify all statutory services (from child protection to registrars) are fully staffed and legally compliant as the new entity begins.</li> </ul>	TBC	detailed continuity plans by late 2027, with first year of new council (2028-29) monitored as a transition period
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			<p>the first time'. This should enable more innovative service models, e.g., multidisciplinary teams that cover a range of resident needs in one visit, or unified customer service centres that handle any enquiry without bouncing citizens between authorities.</p> <p>Importantly, One Oxfordshire avoids breaking apart any services. Many crucial services (adult social care, children's safeguarding, fire &amp; rescue, SEN, highways) are already county-wide; these remain intact and under the same organisational roof, so there's Zero disaggregation risk. Had the county been split into multiple parts, those services would have been divided, but with a single unitary, continuity is maintained.</p> <p>For district-run services (waste collection, local planning, housing, benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council should assign experienced service managers to transition workstreams (as indicated by the plan with specific workstreams for Children's Services, Highways, Housing, etc.). These leads will engage current district officers and subject experts to transfer knowledge into the new organisation. By involving those who run the services now, the new council can avoid reinventing the wheel or missing functions.</li> <li>• A useful mitigation in such reorganisations is to initially keep public interfaces the same, then gradually improve them. So, residents might still</li> </ul>	
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				<p>administration, etc.), the new council will take them on wholesale. All existing service contracts and teams in those areas will transfer to the unitary. Thus, on Day 1, residents should notice no break in service availability: bins will still be collected on the usual days, planning applications will still be processed (just now by 'Oxfordshire Council' instead of District X), etc.</p> <p>The implementation plan explicitly includes service-specific workstreams to ensure each area is mapped and handed over smoothly. For example, there will be dedicated planning to merge IT systems and contact centres so that no emails or calls get lost in the changeover.</p> <p>Over time, the impact on services should be positive enhancements:</p>	<p>use the same phone numbers or websites for a short while, with calls redirected internally. Gradually, the council will consolidate into a single customer platform once it's sure nothing will fall through cracks. This staged approach prevents immediate confusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's programme includes a legal and procurement review of all existing contracts to ensure they are novated correctly and continue to be delivered under the new authority. For example, waste collection contracts that Districts had with providers will be transferred to Oxfordshire Council</li> </ul>	
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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A single council can standardise service levels upward. Currently, some services vary by district (e.g. different waste collection rules, different taxi licensing policies). The unitary can adopt the best approaches and apply them county-wide, making access to services more equal. It also simplifies things like one council tax bill instead of two tiers.</li> <li>• Bringing support services together (one IT system, one finance system) means more resources can be focused on front-line delivery rather than duplicated admin. Also, specialist teams (say a GIS mapping team or legal team) can cover the whole county rather than each</li> </ul>	<p>seamlessly on vesting day. The mitigation for any misalignment is renegotiation or bridging arrangements so that services don't stop. Essentially, residents shouldn't notice any change in their service providers just because governance changed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internally, as noted above, staff will be guided on new processes (so they know where to escalate issues in a new structure). Externally, clear public communication will help mitigate any confusion: e.g. well ahead of time, the councils will inform residents that from X date they will contact 'Oxfordshire Council' for services and</li> </ul>		
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				<p>council having a small team, this creates a larger pool of expertise and resilience if one member is away. For smaller services that each district struggled to maintain, a unitary could provide more capacity (for instance, emergency planning or economic development functions will benefit from unified staffing).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The new leadership might explore cross-cutting reforms. This could lead to new ways of delivering services, like the 'Oxfordshire Way' prevention approach in social care expanding into community services or combining currently separate processes (e.g. a joint assessment for a resident's social care and housing needs).</li> </ul>	<p>reassure them all services remain available. This includes updating signage, websites, emails, etc. on a coordinated schedule so that the public always find the help they need.</p>		
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				<p>Freed from inter-council negotiations, the single authority can implement changes faster.</p> <p>The main potential negative to guard against is short-term disruption during transition. Merging operations is complex: data and IT integration issues could temporarily affect service responsiveness (for example, aligning all customer databases might cause some delays if not properly tested).</p> <p>There is also a risk that during the reorganisation effort, management attention is diverted from day-to-day service performance. The council acknowledges these risks and has committed to prioritise service continuity above all else during the change. The phased approach (with a joint programme team before vesting day) is intended to pre-plan every detail to</p>			
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				make the 'switchover' seamless for the public.			
<b>Providers</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Currently, some providers have contracts with the County Council, others with District Councils, some with both. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The waste management consortium Ubico is employed by some Oxfordshire districts for collection; a different contractor (Biffa) handles others, or a single leisure trust might operate leisure centres in two districts separately.</li> <li>Social care providers (like home care agencies) are contracted by the County, but they also might liaise with</li> </ul>	<p>The council should (and will) proactively engage all major contractors, suppliers, and commissioned partners well before the transition. This may include briefing events or individual meetings to explain how invoicing, contract management, and contacts will change. Clear guidance (FAQs, helpdesk) will be provided so that no provider is confused about who to talk to for their contract. This reduces any administrative hiccups (like a supplier not getting paid on time due to confusion, which the council will want to avoid at all costs).</p> <p>As noted, a combined legal-procurement team is likely reviewing every contract. They will identify any that require formal novation letters or consents from the provider and ensure those are secured. Mitigation for complex cases (if any</p>		

				<p>districts for housing-related support.</p> <p>Immediately upon reorganisation, all these contracts will be transferred to the unitary. The contract terms, payment schedules, and points of contact might eventually be consolidated, but initially the providers continue delivering services as contracted. The new council inherits all legal obligations to pay and manage those contracts.</p> <p>To the providers, the main change is administrative: invoicing 'Oxfordshire Council' instead of, say, 'Cherwell District Council,' but the work and payment shouldn't change. The programme team will communicate with all contractors well in advance to explain the novation of contracts and ensure they are comfortable with it, this is typically a formal process but usually straightforward since</p>	<p>contract has a clause triggered by structural change) is to seek agreement with the provider for continuity or put in place interim arrangements until a new contract can be let.</p> <p>The council should reassure voluntary sector providers that grants or contracts they depend on will continue. For example, if a charity receives grants from multiple district councils and the county, the new council should ideally consolidate those funds (not cut them) and give the charity a single multi-year agreement. Early budget planning in the new council will consider these commitments to prevent any funding gap. Publishing a statement like 'all existing service contracts will be honoured through their term' would be a good practice to settle any nerves in the provider community.</p> <p>To mitigate the risk to small providers, the new council's procurement strategy can include dividing large</p>		
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				<p>the contract terms remain the same, just the client's name changes.</p> <p>Over time, the positive impacts for providers could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instead of, for example, a care home needing separate monitoring visits from county (for care quality) and district (for housing grant compliance), they will have one set of contract managers. This can simplify reporting for providers.</li> <li>• Larger unified contracts might be issued (for instance, a single countywide waste collection contract when current ones expire, or unified grounds maintenance). Big providers might welcome this as it increases scale and</li> </ul>	<p>contracts into regional lots or requiring big contractors to sub-contract locally. OCC's current approach (according to its Social Value Action Plan) is to set up Oxfordshire-only supplier frameworks to give local SMEs a first shot at council business. The unitary can adopt this, meaning even as contracts unify, local businesses and social enterprises get fair opportunity. Additionally, the council will apply the Social Value Act in all procurements, considering economic and social well-being benefits in awarding contracts. (This is expanded under 'Social Value' below.)</p> <p>For key partners (NHS, Police, universities), the council has likely established a liaison group as part of the programme. This ensures external stakeholders align their arrangements (for instance, the Health &amp; Wellbeing Board and Community Safety Partnership will be reconstituted to match the</p>		
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				<p>efficiency, they can serve a larger area under one agreement rather than juggling multiple smaller ones. Similarly, voluntary sector partners might have access to a single, larger grant fund rather than multiple small pots, potentially increasing funding stability if the new council commits to long-term countywide commissioning of services (like homelessness prevention or advice services).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providers often must adapt to different rules in different districts. One Oxfordshire can reduce that complexity (e.g. a housing developer will face one set of planning policies and one Community Infrastructure Levy</li> </ul>	<p>single council structure). Ensuring these partners have updated contacts and that no joint projects fall through the cracks is part of these mitigations.</p> <p>With these measures, providers should experience a smooth transition and possibly easier working relationship with local government after the change. Essentially, the new council wants to be seen as a reliable single client, with timely payments and coherent oversight, thereby maintaining provider goodwill. Over the longer term, any efficiencies in contract management could even translate into savings that allow the council to reinvest in services (potentially benefiting providers through expanded contracts). Since no provider is being specifically targeted for cost-cutting (savings are largely from internal</p>		
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				<p>regime rather than up to five). This regulatory consistency can make Oxfordshire a more attractive place for doing business with the council, as processes will be clearer and uniform.</p> <p>Potential negative impacts or concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There's a risk that if the council moves to very large contracts, smaller local providers could be edged out by big firms. To mitigate this, the council's procurement strategy (and Social Value policy) can break tenders into lots or favour local supply chains where appropriate. Indeed, OCC's Social Value Action Plan specifically aims to create opportunities for</li> </ul>	<p>restructuring), the impact remains neutral/slightly positive.</p>		
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				<p>Oxfordshire-based SMEs/VCSEs (small enterprises and charities) in procurement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some cases, the new council might rationalise overlapping contracts. For example, if two districts had separate but similar contracts with the same provider (say for software or equipment), the council might merge them into one sooner than waiting for expiry, by negotiation. This should not harm the provider (it may simplify their dealings), but it requires legal handling.</li> <li>• Partners such as the NHS or Thames Valley Police, while not 'providers' to the council, will suddenly interact with one</li> </ul>			
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				council instead of six on various boards and operational matters. This is generally positive (simpler partnership), but they will need to adjust their contacts and possibly agreements (like information-sharing protocols) to reflect the new structure. Early engagement is underway to ensure partners are ready for this change, and they largely support having a single interlocutor for the county.			
<b>Social Value <sup>1</sup></b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Although the 'One Oxfordshire' proposal is not a procurement, the reorganisation can influence the council's approach to Social Value – i.e., the additional economic, social, and environmental benefits	Adoption of a Single Social Value Policy should be one of the first tasks to merge the existing County and District policies on social value into one robust policy for the unitary. Given OCC has an updated policy framework,	Head of Commercial & Procurement	New Social Value Policy adopted by Vesting Day, apply to all new procurements thereafter.

<sup>1</sup> If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area

				<p>arising from council activities, especially regarding how it commissions services, works with communities, and fosters well-being. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires councils to consider improving social, economic, environmental well-being in procurement of services. Oxfordshire County Council already has a strong social value policy and has recently developed a new definition and action plan for social value. A single unitary council provides a chance to embed these principles across all services and contracts county-wide, potentially generating greater social value. The impact is positive in that it can amplify initiatives like local job creation, carbon reduction, and community resilience by leveraging the larger scale of the new council. There is no identified negative aspect – at worst, it's neutral if the council simply</p>	<p>the new council can likely extend that to cover all procurement (including former district domains). This policy should be approved by the new council's Cabinet early on, signalling the importance of social value in everything from construction projects to service contracts.</p> <p>Ensure that all commissioning officers and decision-makers in the new council understand how to incorporate social value. The Commercial team is already planning learning &amp; development around this – that will continue. Councillors on the new council will also be briefed so that, for instance, when approving a contract award, they expect to see social value considerations included.</p> <p>Some services (like waste collection, housing maintenance) that were previously district-led might</p>		
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				<p>carries on existing practices; at best, it actively uses the unification to drive more ambitious social value outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The new council becomes one of the largest purchasers and employers in the region. By having a single procurement service, it can ensure that for every contract, considerations like using local suppliers, creating apprenticeships, and supporting small businesses are built in. Previously, one council might do this and another might not; now it can be uniform. For example, if Oxfordshire Council builds a new road or school, it can set requirements for contractors to hire local apprentices or use local supply chains,</li> </ul>	<p>not have embedded social value clauses historically. As those contracts come up for renewal under the unitary, the council can enhance them with social value requirements. A mitigation here is to avoid any lapses, i.e., ensure that even during interim periods, no opportunities for social value are missed. For example, if a district contract is expiring in 2026 (before the unitary goes live), perhaps extension options are considered to let the new council handle a more social-value-rich re-procurement post-2028.</p> <p>The new council should track the social value delivered. OCC noted current reporting was 'sporadic' and intends to improve contract management to ensure promised social value is delivered. The unitary can strengthen this by, for instance, using the Social Value Portal or similar tools</p>		
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				<p>thus boosting local employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The council can harmonise how it supports volunteering, community groups, and addressing inequalities. The proposal links closely to the idea of inclusive growth and tackling deprivation. Social value in procurement might mean insisting that service providers contribute to community programs (like a bus company providing free travel to jobseekers as part of a contract). Also, an integrated council can pursue 'community wealth building' strategies – keeping wealth within local communities by contracting locally and encouraging employee-led</li> </ul>	<p>across all services. Strong monitoring will ensure the positive impacts (jobs, community benefits) materialise on the ground</p> <p>The council itself can create initiatives – like a local community fund or support for apprenticeships, using the efficiencies gained. This is a way to directly channel some of the £30m savings into social value projects (for example, funding community centres, or investing in renewable energy on council buildings, which yields environmental and social returns). Even though the savings are needed for financial sustainability, prioritising some reinvestment in preventative, community-level work (aligned with being a 'Marmot County' to tackle health inequalities) would greatly boost the social outcomes of the reform.</p>		
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				<p>enterprises. OCC's Cabinet in Sept 2024 approved new social value principles to do exactly this; the new council will inherit those commitments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A single council can have a unified climate action plan (e.g. net-zero targets) and use its purchasing power to enforce green standards (low-emission vehicles in contracts, biodiversity net gain in planning, etc.). The Social Value Act encompasses environmental well-being, so procurement can reward bidders who offer carbon reductions or other green benefits. With all services combined, policies like moving to electric vehicle fleets or sustainable</li> </ul>	<p>Legally, for any service contract over the threshold, the council must consider social value. The new council's larger procurement will certainly meet that threshold regularly, so to mitigate any risk of non-compliance, standard procedures will be in place to document how social value is considered for each relevant contract. The Commercial team will continue to have a legal obligation to ensure the provisions of the Social Value Act 2012 are implemented effectively. Doing so uniformly across the new entity is the mitigation against any part of the council lagging.</p>		
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				<p>construction can be applied more broadly.</p> <p>Additionally, One Oxfordshire's scale might allow innovation in delivering social value. The Commercial &amp; Procurement Service's action plan (2025) outlines steps such as establishing local supplier frameworks and setting default social value criteria for tenders. As a large unitary, implementing these will have a wider impact: for instance, default criteria could include requiring contractors to contribute to local workforce skills – doing this across all spend (county and district functions combined) means more benefit accrues in absolute terms than if only some councils did it.</p> <p>There is also a community development dimension: the new council's emphasis on area committees and locality working can generate social value by empowering local</p>			
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				<p>initiatives (e.g. supporting social enterprises, parish councils, etc.). While this is indirectly related, it aligns with the intent to improve social outcomes as part of the council's operation.</p>			
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## Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

<b>Review Date</b>	<b>30/10/2026</b>
<b>Person Responsible for Review</b>	<b>Glyn – you put your name here</b>
<b>Authorised By</b>	<b>Helen / Lorna name here</b>