

Local Government Reorganisation

Single Tier Unitary Authority

Why the change to a Unitary Authority



Reduce administrative duplication



Save costs – up to £63m



Improve service efficiency



Streamline accountability



Facilitating broader devolution to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority (Thames Valley)



What is changing?



The government is proposing single unitary councils to replace the current two tiers of government currently in Oxfordshire (county and district councils)



Reorganising smaller councils such as West Berkshire into more sustainable areas



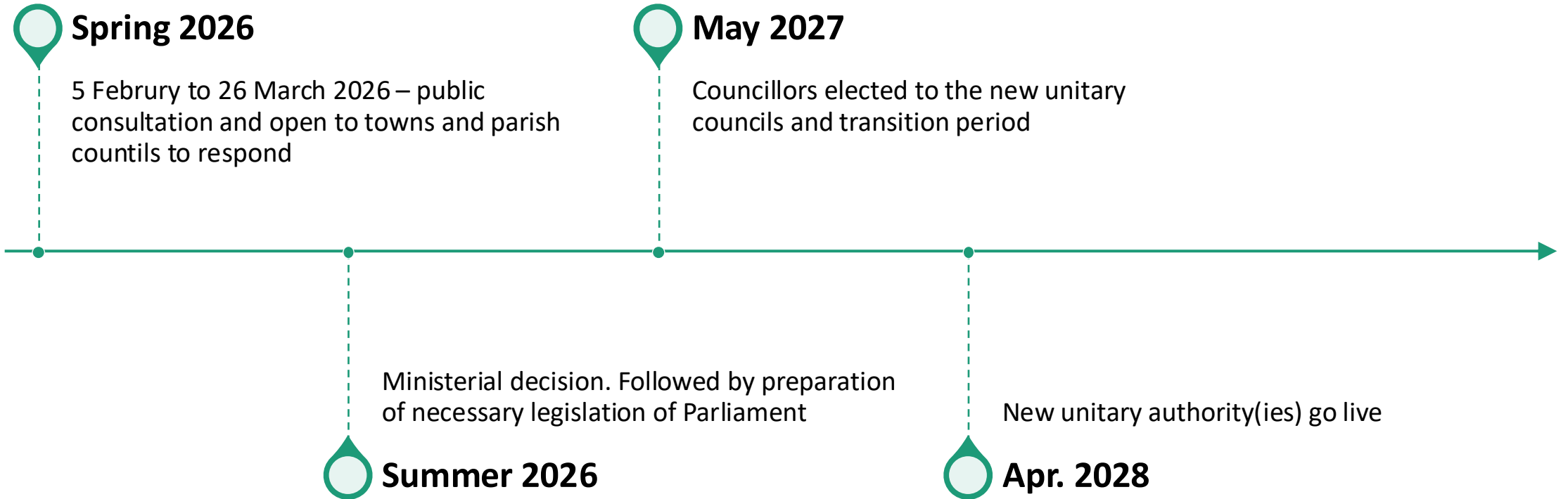
The government's stated optimum unitary council size is around 500,000 residents with all services provided by one authority

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Timetable



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The three options

Option 1 – One Unitary Council (proposed by Oxfordshire County Council)

A single unitary council for the whole of Oxfordshire

Excludes West Berkshire

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The three options

Option 2 – Two Unitary Councils (proposed by Vale, South Oxfordshire, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell district councils and West Berkshire)

Oxford & Shires Council to include Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire

Ridgeway Council to include South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, and the unitary council of West Berkshire



The three options

Option 3 – Three Unitary Councils (proposal led by Oxford City Council)

Greater Oxford Council – covering Oxford and its Green Belt

North Oxfordshire Council – including most of Cherwell and West Oxfordshire districts

An adaption of the Ridgeway Council to include most of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse districts combined with West Berkshire unitary council.

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Government alternative

The government can vary the proposals on the table
and offer an alternative Unitary Authority for
Oxfordshire

Where will Sunningwell Parish sit?

Option 1 One Oxfordshire 796,000 (population)

(excludes West Berkshire Unitary Authority with a population of 163,811)

Option 2 Two UAs

Ridgeway ((Vale (including Sunningwell) & South Oxfordshire, West Berkshire))
482,702 (population)

Oxford City & Shires (West Oxfordshire and Cherwell) 471,716 (population)

Option 3 Greater Oxford (will include Sunningwell) 272,000 (population)

And this proposal also includes:

Northern Unitary Authority 246,000 (population)

Southern Unitary Authority 436,000 (population)

Current split of services

Oxfordshire County Council

- Adults' and childrens' social care
- Maintaining roads
- Libraries
- Waste disposal

District Councils

- Rubbish collection
- Housing and planning
- Environment health



In the future a Unitary Authority will be delivering all local services

Main concerns include:

- Provide continuity of current services with the least disruption
- Combine high level services with local services
- Improve services long term – SEND, care, potholes etc
- Manage housing development
- Ensure community engagement and meet local needs
- Be financially resilient



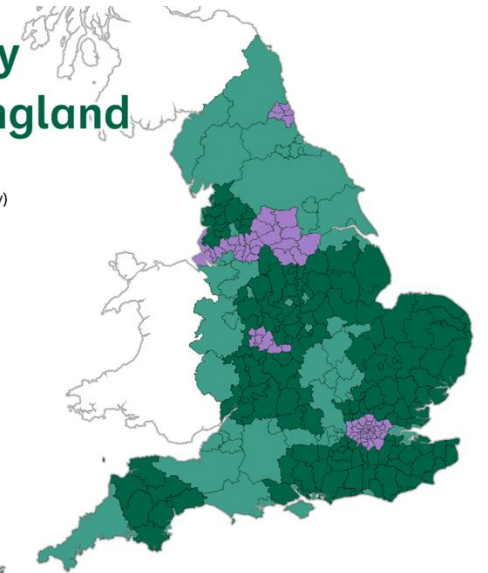
Unknowns and reassurance

- Impact of boundaries changes especially given our proximity to the city
- Reduction of councillors – we have three excellent and supportive councillors
- Impact of redundancies and infrastructure
- Local engagement models/areas
- Impact on parish councils/councillors – more responsibility may be devolved down
- We will get a mayor under the devolution process
- Other areas of England have become Unitary Authorities

Local authority structure in England

- Two-tier council (district and county)
- Unitary authority
- Metropolitan or London borough

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Government consultation questions

- Sensible geographic and economic areas
- Ability to deliver the outcomes in proposals
- Right size to be efficient, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
- Ability to deliver high quality, sustainable public services
- Informed by local view and will meet local needs
- Support devolution arrangements
- Enables stronger community engagement and gives the opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment
- Sets out a strong public services and financial sustainability justification for the changes

Why having your say is important

- There is no referendum – you can only input your views via the consultation
- Accountability
 - Government's decision should represent the views of Oxfordshire residents and fulfil the criteria outlined in the proposal brief
 - Identify areas in the proposals that don't meet the criteria specified by the government



How do the proposers compare their proposals to other two on the table

Red – does not meet the criterion

Amber – Partially meets the criterion

Green – Meets the criterion



A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/)advantaged areas

Opt 1 – Positive for house supply but WB remains financially unsustainable

Opt 2 – Enables housing supply across the area and no area is disadvantage

Opt 3 – Challenges around nature and deliverability of houses. Creates disadvantage areas



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Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks

Opt 1 – Creates one of the larger unitary councils in England and is significantly above the guidance level (500,000)

Opt 2 – Creates two unitary councils at the optimal size to achieve efficiencies, create capacity and avoids being too large

Opt 3 – Creates two councils below the guidance levels, thus limiting efficiencies



Prioritises the delivery of high quality and sustainable services to citizens

Opt 1 – Avoids disruption to key services but also risks little improvement through keep too much of the status quo

Opt 2 – Short term alignment will need to be managed but existing services offer the chance to really tailor and improve outcomes

Opt 3 – Wholesale disaggregation of county and district services, boundary changes and time required to implement



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Councils work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views

Opt 1 – Concerns over engagement of WB and rural areas in Oxfordshire

Opt 2 – Clear support for considering West Berkshire along with Oxfordshire to shape local government in the area

Opt 3 – Concerns about being city centric and issues about protecting the greenbelt



New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements

Opt 1 – Risk of distinct economic strengths being lost in a large Oxfordshire and leaves an imbalance of UA's in the Combined Authority context

Opt 2 – Coherent economic geographics to support effective growth and devolution aims – with optimal sized Uas

Opt 3 – Could be seen to have a strong growth hub around the city but wouldn't support so well the smaller UAs in the Combined Authority



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Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood

Opt 1 – Risk that scale and lack of effective community engagement at that level could result in poor community engagement

Opt 2 – Strong localities model building on proven track record of effective community engagement and growth

Opt 3 – Likely to resolve issues in terms of community engagement within the city



Proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government



Opt 1 – Will achieve a single tier of local government for the whole of Oxfordshire. Will help to increase housing supply. Provides an equitable taxbase cross the county

Opt 2 – Achieves a 2 tier UA for the whole of Oxfordshire, geographical breaks means it is more challenging to deliver housing supply. Taxbase could be unequal across the county

Opt 3 – Achieve 3 tiers of local government, geographical splits makes housing supply unattainable. Taxbase would be unequal across the county



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Councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks



Opt 1 – One council would be above 500,000 residents, inline with government requirements. This option enables maximum saving with optimal payback periods

Opt 2 – Two councils would be under the population of new councils required by the government. Achieve some savings but reduced because of disaggregation. 2 councils under the government threshold will reduce resilience to withstand financial shocks

Opt 3 – Numbers significantly under the population threshold. Lowest savings off-set by disaggregation. Size would make it less resilient to financial shocks



Councils must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens



Opt 1 – Provides continuity of critical services rated ‘good’ for adult and children’s social care. Continuity of SEND programmes. Avoids cost of disaggregation, fragmentation of services, opportunity to improve services and financial headroom

Opt 2 – Excessive disaggregation of critical services. Cost and risk of transferring Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue into a temporary combined authority. Provides some opportunities to improve service. Financial headroom and capacity to invest

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How councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views



Opt 1 – Councils have worked together, residents have indicated they want simplicity and cost effectiveness, least disruption to services and strong community involvement

Opt 2 – Councils have worked together, option will not deliver simplicity and cost effectiveness, address concerns about size of UA will be less local and financial constraints will limit investments

Opt 3 – Councils have worked together, option will not deliver simplicity and cost effectiveness, will be less local and financial constraints will limit investments



Proposals must support devolution arrangements



Opt 1 Unlocks effective devolution to a Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority. Will provide a strong single voice for the complete functional economic area of Oxfordshire

Opt 2 – Devolution is possible however, it fragments the county and risking it being a functional economic area. Creates distinct and competing influences for Oxfordshire

Opt 3 – Devolution is possible however, it significantly fragments the county and risking it being a functional economic area. Creates distinct and competing influences for Oxfordshire



Stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment



Opt 1 Single council has the financial headroom and scale to invest in strong community involvement and an effective neighbourhood government model that can be sustained long-term

Opt 2 – Two councils can reflect local view and engage more consistently, councils address size of UA but an effective neighbourhood governance model is still needed, restricted finances to deliver

Opt 3 – Three councils can reflect local view and engage more consistently, councils address size of UA but an effective neighbourhood governance model is still needed, significantly restricted finances to deliver



A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/)advantaged areas



- **Opt 1** - This would create the third largest unitary in the country and cover too diverse an area to deliver local priorities. It would deliver fewer homes and lower economic growth than other proposals, and the housing
- **Opt 2** This creates authorities of an appropriate population size with a sensible geography for Ridgeway. However, the merging of Oxford and Shires combines two distinct geographies with very different priorities and demographics. This would retain the under-bounding of Oxford and deliver fewer homes than a three unitary proposal, with more of these homes being built in rural areas north and west of the Green Belt and affecting the character of villages.
- **Opt 3** - Creates a single tier through 3UA: a Greater Oxford, Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway. By addressing the under-bounding of Oxford, targeted Green Belt release will deliver the most homes, in places which minimise the impact on the environment, infrastructure and existing rural settlements.

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Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks



- Opt 1 This option would deliver the most benefits in economies of scale and, with the largest revenue budget, increase its resilience to financial shocks. However, it would also be least able to deliver public service reform which responds to local needs to address demand and reduce the overall cost of service delivery.
- Opt 2 This would create savings through economies of scale, although less than a single unitary, and be viable with ability to withstand financial shocks. However, savings from rationalisations would be smaller than the additional costs of demand.
- Opt 3 - Creates three unitary areas which are financially viable and deliver savings from economies of scale. The greater savings will be driven by the transformation of services to a preventative approach with a place-based approach to ensure that services work within each location to best reduce demand, and therefore cost, while improving outcomes.



Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens



- **Opt 1** - This would minimise disruption as many services are currently provided by the County authority. However, this would also limit the ability for public service reform around a deep understanding of local communities at a place-based level. The size of organisation would limit its ability to deliver agile and fast transformation and be flexible to tailor high quality public services to local needs.
- **Opt 2** - The 2UA model would be more able to tailor services to meet the needs of its geographies than the single unitary option – particularly in Ridgeway. However, the contrasting populations, demands and priorities of Oxford and Shires would require constant balance to deliver appropriate services to very distinct areas within one authority.
- **Opt 3** - The proposal ensures services are high quality and tailored to local needs through close collaboration with the local community and partners. Decisions can focus on the needs of specific areas, and analysis has shown all unitary authorities will deliver sustainable services which focus on prevention and align with the wider public sector reform agenda

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Councils must work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views



- Opt 1 - This proposal does not respond to the clear view expressed by all LGR engagement across the county that councils should be closely linked to their communities and that bigger authorities risk losing touch with residents.
- Opt 2`While Ridgeway would be able to respond to local needs across its villages and market towns, Oxford and Shires would need to balance competing local needs. This would not be informed by local views, which want councils based on areas relevant to their communities and show that the north of Oxfordshire and city of Oxford view themselves as distinct from each other.
- Opt 3 - A comprehensive and inclusive engagement programme has been delivered across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire to understand the local needs and views which this proposal seeks to address Through this it gives residents more say in local planning and ensures services are tailored to the specific needs of each place, meeting the desire for councils to be locally responsive and relevant to their communities.

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New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements



- Opt 1 - A single unitary would be too close in size to the MSA and would account for at least 37% of its total population. It would aim to take a strategic view over the area, duplicating the strategic role of the MSA. It would mean that Oxfordshire's rural and urban areas would only have one voice at the MSA level for its diverse views and priorities, and Oxford would have a weaker voice than the other main economic centres in the MSA.
- Opt 2 - This would support devolution arrangements better than a single authority. However, Oxford and Shires would mean a single voice at MSA level would need to represent both rural and urban needs rather than distinct areas. It would weaken the voice of Oxford compared to other major economic centres in the MSA.
- Opt 3 - This proposes a balance of three voices across Oxfordshire to the Mayoral Strategic Authority, representing the distinct interests of the rural and urban populations. It gives consistency of scale across the Thames Valley MSA, and a voice for Oxford, a globally significant economic centre, alongside with the other authorities represented.

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Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment



- Opt 1 - The size of the unitary would make it feel too distanced from the communities it serves to be able to engage and co-design meaningfully. Having to balance the views of a major city, a network of market towns and rural communities would give too many contrasting priorities to be able to ensure specific neighbourhoods are suitably empowered.
- Opt 2 - Ridgeway would be able to engage strongly and deliver neighbourhood empowerment across its towns and villages. There would be a greater challenge across Oxford and Shires, which would need to develop distinct approaches and models for its urban and rural areas. Those living in “the shires” would feel their priorities are competing with Oxford and vice versa, reducing the feeling of empowerment and being heard in working with communities.
- Opt 3 - Three unitaries enable governance which is more tailored and representative to local need. It will support local leaders to better understand and tackle local challenges. It supports increased community engagement in democratic processes, the design of services and community empowerment more generally. It allows each area to speak for itself and its own identity and priorities.

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Government consultation

Sunningwell Parish Council recognises there are advantages and disadvantages with all the proposals and encourages parishioners to make their view known.

To complete the online consultation visit:

<https://consult.communities.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation/oxfordshire/>

The government is under no obligation to adopt any of the three proposals and can impose their own preferred option (or a variant of one of the three proposals) when the deciding the Unitary Authority model for Oxfordshire

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