Supplement for

Scrutiny Committee

On **Wednesday 5 November 2025** At **6.00 pm**

Agenda Item 6 Local Government Reorganisation - Appendix 3 - One Unitary Authority Proposal - One Oxfordshire

Contents

6. **Local Government Reorganisation** 3 - 574

Cabinet, at its Special meeting on 10 November 2025, will be presented with three final unitary proposals and decide which proposal should be submitted to Government by Oxford City Council on 28 November 2025.

All Oxfordshire Councils have been invited to submit proposals for Local Government Reorganisation, replacing existing two-tier councils with a single 'unitary' layer of local government. Oxford City Council has been developing a proposal for the creation of three unitary councils across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. Proposals for two unitaries (covering Oxon & W Berks), and a single unitary (covering Oxon) being developed by other councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

The Committee is asked to consider the item and agree any recommendations.

Reports will be published as late supplement.

The agenda, reports and any additional supplements can be found together with this supplement on the committee meeting webpage.

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One council: One Oxfordshire

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Why One Oxfordshire?

We set out why Oxfordshire works as a footprint for local government reorganisation through a clear analysis of our place, people, partnerships and economy – and how this supports our case for change for One Oxfordshire.

We demonstrate our financial resilience and share what people think of our proposal. We evidence their support as well as show how we will meet people's needs and concerns.

One Oxfordshire provides the strongest opportunities associated with having all the levers of local government at the disposal of one council.

Let's make this happen – let's build one Oxfordshire Council.

Hook Norton

1. Introduction

1.1 Foreword

"Every place is unique, but Oxfordshire is truly special. It is a county of contrasting and connected communities whose ideas and discoveries have changed lives around the world, making it an exceptional place to live and work.

"From world-class universities and cutting-edge science parks to a rich cultural heritage and a highly skilled population of over 760,000, Oxfordshire plays a vital role in driving innovation, job creation and economic prosperity for the region and the nation.

"Connectivity and diversity are key to our county's success. Our internationally renowned campuses such as Bicester Motion, Culham, Harwell and Milton Park, are pioneering new developments in AI, quantum computing, space technology, biomedical sciences and robotics. These are boosted by the exchange of ideas and talent from our academic institutions and businesses – start-ups and global giants.

"However, the county is not without its challenges. An ageing population, rising demand for services, a housing affordability ratio, which is among the highest in England, and a lack of transport connectivity between towns, cities and rural areas are hindering economic growth, and placing services under significant strain.

"The government's call for local government reform is therefore both timely and necessary. We have listened carefully to our residents, partners and stakeholders, and we are ready to lead the way through One Oxfordshire.

"We will deliver a £63 million annual saving by creating a single county unitary. We will reduce duplication, protect our critical services and have the scale to focus and invest in prevention and early help, tackling inequalities and homelessness.

"One Oxfordshire is not just a structural solution; it is a vision for a stronger, fairer and more ambitious future for the county. By bringing together all the levers of local government into a single, resilient authority, we can unlock the full potential of our people and places, drive innovation and deliver the high quality services our communities deserve.

"This is a once in a generation chance to seize the opportunities that public sector reform, together with devolution, offers. One Oxfordshire will provide the scale and stability to withstand future financial shocks, the efficiency to maximise value for money, and the ambition to deliver real and lasting benefits for every resident and business, and for the nation as a whole."

Councillor Liz Leffman,
Leader of Oxfordshire County Council

1.2 Executive summary

The government has laid out its plans for the future of local government, planning and infrastructure, the NHS and the industrial strategy in England. This comes at a time when public finances are under significant strain and councils across England are facing either immediate or future crises as a result. Oxfordshire, while not immune to these challenges, is well placed to respond to them – not least as result of prudent and far-sighted treasury and financial management over many years.

Oxfordshire is a county of national and global significance, renowned for its world-class universities, cutting-edge science and technology clusters, and vibrant communities. Yet, the current two-tier system of local government no longer serves the county's needs. Fragmentation, duplication and inefficiency are impeding Oxfordshire's ability to deliver the scale of transformation, efficiency and resilience required by the government's devolution and public sector reform agenda. Change is needed to enable all Oxfordshire's residents to thrive and for the county to realise its full potential as an economic and innovation powerhouse.

The government's statutory invitation and the English Devolution White Paper have made clear that local government must be large enough to withstand financial shocks, deliver high quality services, and unlock the benefits of devolution. The proposal for One Oxfordshire – a single unitary council for the county – offers a robust, evidence-based proposal that meets and exceeds the government's criteria for reorganisation: scale, efficiency, financial resilience and improved outcomes for residents.

Our proposal for local government reorganisation sets out why One Oxfordshire is the right footprint for the county – one which will deliver stronger, simpler services that are closer to communities, connected and cost effective.

Our case for change

Financial resilience and value for money

The financial case for One Oxfordshire is compelling and independently verified. We will deliver a £63 million annual saving by creating a single unitary council for Oxfordshire, with total net savings of £163 million achieved by year five. These savings are achieved through the aggregation of services, transformation of delivery and the elimination of duplication across six councils.

With transition costs of under £22 million, the payback period is just 1.3 years. Moreover, this proposal does not require ongoing government financial support. One Oxfordshire provides the fastest, cheapest and lowest risk transition to a new council.

Financial modelling demonstrates that only One Oxfordshire has the scale to withstand future funding shocks, including those anticipated from the Fair Funding Review 2.0 and business rates reset, ensuring that services are protected for the long-term.

Service continuity, integration and improvement

Service continuity and improvement are at the heart of this proposal. Oxfordshire County Council already delivers services on a countywide footprint, providing 85 per cent of local government services by expenditure. One Oxfordshire will avoid the costly and risky disaggregation of high-performing services, particularly in adult and children's social care. Our proposal is laser-focused on protecting and improving these critical services, with a proven track record of "good" ratings from Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.

By integrating upper and lower tier services, One Oxfordshire will enable systematic transformation – unifying waste services, creating person-centred homelessness support and joining up planning, housing and highways. Residents and businesses will benefit from a single front door to all services, simplifying access and reducing confusion.

The risks of fragmentation are clear: disaggregating services would increase costs, reduce standards, and undermine the progress made in areas such as the Oxfordshire Way – a prevention and early intervention programme that has delivered a 67 per cent reduction in adults waiting for social care assessment and a 20 per cent reduction in long-term care needs. A single unitary would also avoid the unnecessary, costly and temporary disaggregation of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Only a single council can safeguard, promote and optimise Oxfordshire's unique asset base, ensuring that high-performing services are not only preserved but enhanced.

Economic growth and national impact

Oxfordshire is one of only four county areas that are net contributors to the UK exchequer, generating £29.3 billion in GVA annually and supporting 430,000 jobs. The county hosts the highest concentration of science research facilities in Western Europe and has attracted over £3.1 billion in foreign direct investment since 2017. Major global firms such as Moderna and BMW, alongside the University of Oxford's spinouts valued at £6.4 billion, underpin a thriving innovation ecosystem.

One Oxfordshire will provide the governance and strategic clarity needed to build a successful Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, unlock housing and infrastructure, and drive inclusive growth – directly supporting the government's Industrial Strategy.

The Knowledge Spine, which connects Bicester, Oxford and the Science Vale, serves as the backbone of Oxfordshire's innovation ecosystem, supporting high-skill employment and enterprise growth. Oxfordshire's economic coherence has long been recognised by central government, and a unified approach through One Oxfordshire will enhance the county's capacity to drive national growth through innovation and expertise. Evidence is compelling that Oxfordshire's economic success, particularly in advanced research and manufacturing, has created significant employment and

growth in other regions of the UK. This could be stalled if economic coherence is lost through disaggregation and reduced scale.

Strategic planning, housing and infrastructure

The current system of local governance has failed to deliver the strategic planning and housing Oxfordshire needs. In the current planning round, Oxford City Council has had its local plan rejected at examination stage for failing to meet the duty to cooperate. The planning inspectorate has also written to Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council recommending that their joint-plan is withdrawn, again on the issue of the duty to cooperate.

In addition, the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – the precursor to the Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (Oxfordshire Plan 2050) – failed in 2022 on the issue of agreeing housing numbers. These failures demonstrate the urgent need for a fresh start and that scale is essential when making decisions about growth.

One Oxfordshire will create a single local planning authority, streamlining decision-making, resources and governance. This will support faster, more coordinated progress towards housing and development goals, ensuring coordination of infrastructure and a localised and authentic approach to community involvement.

The county's ambitious OxRAIL 2040 strategy and the ability to act as a single point of contact for major infrastructure projects will enable Oxfordshire to respond effectively to national priorities and deliver regeneration at scale. Delivery of sustainable development is critical to the county's economic success and to the government's wider growth agenda.

Partnership, collaboration and devolution

We will operate as a strong partner within a future Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority, enabling coherent regional planning, transport and economic development. One Oxfordshire supports government ambitions for integrated health and care, with pooled budgets and neighbourhood-level delivery in partnership with the NHS and voluntary and community sector. Oxfordshire's extensive network of partnerships and organisations, strengthened after the COVID pandemic, will be leveraged to deliver improved outcomes for residents and businesses.

Our One Oxfordshire proposal is underpinned by extensive engagement with residents, MPs, businesses, public sector providers and our workforce, including focus groups, interviews and a statistically representative residents' survey. Lessons from comparable unitarisation programmes, such as in Buckinghamshire, together with independent research and assurance from sector experts, have informed our transition and implementation plan.

Democratic accountability and localism

One Oxfordshire will strengthen local democracy through robust neighbourhood governance, area committees and closer partnerships with town and parish councils. We will ensure that decision making is brought closer to communities, their local voices heard, with clear accountability and a single set of councillors operating at the heart of their areas. Oxford's city status and identity will be protected through modern charter trustees and dedicated governance arrangements.

We recognise the importance of local identity and a new council will be designed to ensure that the benefits of reform are felt in every community across the county. Residents have made it clear that they want a council that is cost effective, delivers consistent services that are easy to access, and listens and responds to local communities. One Oxfordshire will address these priorities and make local government work better for everyone.

Risk mitigation and deliverability

Risk mitigation and deliverability are central to the One Oxfordshire approach. This is the fastest, lowest risk and lowest cost transition of all three options, building on the firm foundations of existing countywide delivery and minimising disruption for residents and partners. The proposal is grounded in robust financial planning, independent assurance, and a clear implementation framework that balances strategic oversight, operational continuity and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

The transition plan is structured around clear phases, with dedicated programme governance, risk management and independent assurance to ensure that the benefits of reform are realised safely and effectively. The county council's experience, financial resilience and partnerships provide a strong and robust platform for delivering One Oxfordshire and leading the transition to an ambitious new council.

One Oxfordshire: a compelling, evidence-based solution

One Oxfordshire is the only proposal that fully meets the government's criteria for local government reorganisation. It offers the scale to serve over 760,000 residents; the efficiency to maximise savings and provide the best value for money; the resilience to withstand financial shocks and invest in long-term growth; and the service excellence to protect and improve critical services. It is directly aligned with government policy on public sector reform, devolution and economic growth.

This is a pivotal opportunity to deliver a stronger, simpler and more prosperous future for Oxfordshire and the nation. We can achieve this through a new successor council that can build on firm foundations for modern and effective local government, an institution with the strength and voice to activate exciting and enduring positive change, and one that people can be proud of – a council that is on their side.

Let's build one Oxfordshire Council.

1.3 Options appraisal

We know local government and governance in Oxfordshire needs to change, and we welcome this. Oxfordshire County Council has been an advocate for reorganisation for many years and recognise the benefits it will bring to our residents and wider stakeholders.

This new opportunity for reorganisation has brought a fresh focus for what could work for Oxfordshire and the options available. Based on the statutory invitation issued to Oxfordshire, we have undertaken a robust options appraisal to determine what best meets the government's criteria. We have considered:

1. One council for all of Oxfordshire.
2. Two councils (eastern/western Oxfordshire, northern/southern Oxfordshire and Oxford plus the surrounding county).
3. Three councils (Oxford and two rural authorities).

The criteria tables on pages 162 - 163 summarise which chapters of our proposal demonstrate how we meet each of the government's criteria.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 1. Introduction

The options

A scoring was applied to assess viability against the government's criteria. Our options appraisal shows the demonstrable benefits of one Oxfordshire council.

1	Low score against government criteria
2	Medium score against government criteria
3	High score against government criteria

Government criteria	Option 1: One Oxfordshire council	Option 2: Two Oxfordshire councils	Option 3: Three Oxfordshire councils
Proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government	This option will achieve a single tier of local government for the whole of Oxfordshire.	This option will achieve two single tiers of local government for the whole of Oxfordshire.	This option will achieve three single tiers of local government for the whole of Oxfordshire.
	Option covers an established geography and economic area which will help to increase housing supply.	Option breaks the established geography and economic area into two and makes it more challenging to deliver increased housing supply	While Oxford city has a recognised geography, this option breaks the established economic area into three and makes delivery of increased housing supply virtually unattainable
	Option provides an appropriate taxbase which allows for the differences in need (services) and resources (funding) and does not create any undue advantage or disadvantage across the geography.	Option provides two smaller taxbases which could result in differences in need (services) and resources (funding) which would likely create undue advantage or disadvantage across the geography.	Option does not provide an appropriate taxbase to allow for the differences in need (services) and resources (funding) and would create undue advantage or disadvantage across the geography.
Meets government criteria?	**3**	**2**	**1**

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 1. Introduction

Government criteria	Option 1: One Oxfordshire council	Option 2: Two Oxfordshire councils	Option 3: Three Oxfordshire councils
Councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	One council would be above 500,000 residents, in line with government requirements.	Two councils would be under the population for new councils required by government.	Three councils would be significantly under the population for new councils required by government.
	Option enables maximum savings for the short, medium and long-term with the optimal payback period.	Option supports some savings; however, these are reduced by the costs of disaggregation.	Option enables the lowest savings, which are mostly offset by the costs of disaggregation.
	The strongest option for future financial resilience.	Creation of two councils, under the population threshold creates councils with reduced resilience to withstand financial shocks.	Creation of three councils, significantly under the population threshold does not create councils with the resilience to withstand financial shocks.
Meets government criteria?	**3**	**2**	**1**
Councils must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	Provides continuity of critical services rated 'good' for both adult and children's social care. Provides continuity for SEND improvement programme. The risks and costs associated with disaggregation will be avoided.	Disaggregation of critical services will need to take place. This means additional cost and risk.	Excessive disaggregation of critical services will need to take place. This means additional cost and risk.
	Avoids unnecessary fragmentation of services. creating relative stability for further transformation and public sector reform to take place at pace.	Disaggregation will need to take place for all upper tier services. This option will also include the costs and risk of transferring Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service into a highly temporary combined fire authority structure.	Excessive disaggregation will need to take place for all upper tier services This option will also include the costs and risk of transferring Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service into a highly temporary combined fire authority structure.
	Provides the opportunity to improve service delivery through consolidation of some services such as homelessness	Provides some opportunity to improve service delivery through consolidation of some services such as homelessness	Provides little opportunity to improve service delivery through consolidation of some services such as homelessness
	Financial headroom offered by one council allows for greater opportunities for investment in prevention, neighbourhood working and ongoing transformation.	Lower levels of financial headroom mean lower capacity for investment in prevention, neighbourhood working and ongoing transformation.	The least level of financial headroom means minimal investment in prevention, neighbourhood working and ongoing transformation.
Meets government criteria?	**3**	**1**	**1**

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 1. Introduction

Government criteria	Option 1: One Oxfordshire council	Option 2: Two Oxfordshire councils	Option 3: Three Oxfordshire councils
Proposals should show 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.	Councils have worked together to share information.	Councils have worked together to share information.	Councils have worked together to share information.
	Engagement has demonstrated that residents and stakeholders value simplicity and cost effectiveness. This is in addition to a lack of disruption to services.	This option will not deliver the simplicity and cost effectiveness that residents and stakeholders want.	This option will not deliver the simplicity and cost effectiveness that residents and stakeholders want.
	Strong community involvement and an effective neighbourhood working model, supported by financial headroom, are needed to balance the organisation's size.	While two organisations partly address concerns about size, they remain less local than the current two-tier system. Reduced financial flexibility will also limit investment in new neighbourhood models.	While three organisations address concerns about size, they remain less local than the current two-tier system. Limited financial flexibility will also limit investment in new neighbourhood models.
Meets government criteria?	**2**	**1**	**1**
Proposals must support devolution arrangements.	Option unlocks effective devolution to a Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority.	Devolution is possible under this option; however, it weakens the benefits that Oxfordshire can secure by fragmenting the functional economic area.	Devolution is possible under this option; however, it significantly weakens the benefits that Oxfordshire can secure by fragmenting the functional economic area.
	A single council will provide a strong single voice for the complete functional economic area of Oxfordshire.	Creates distinct differences and competing influences for Oxfordshire.	Creates distinct differences and competing influences for Oxfordshire.
Meets government criteria?	**3**	**2**	**1**

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 1. Introduction

Government criteria	Option 1: One Oxfordshire council	Option 2: Two Oxfordshire councils	Option 3: Three Oxfordshire councils
Proposals should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.	A single council has the financial headroom and the scale to invest in strong community involvement and an effective neighbourhood governance model that can be sustained long-term. It will also balance the organisation's size.	Two councils have an opportunity to reflect local views and engagement more consistently. Two councils may partly address concerns about size, strong community involvement but an effective neighbourhood governance model is still needed. The reduced financial headroom means that structures which enable strong community engagement may not be sustained in the long-term.	Three councils have an opportunity to reflect local views and engagement more consistently. Three councils address concerns about size, strong community involvement but an effective neighbourhood governance model is still needed. The significantly reduced financial headroom means that structures which enable strong community engagement may not either be developed or sustained in the long-term.
Meets government criteria?	**3**	**2**	**2**
12			
Totals	**17**	**10**	**7**

Other proposals have been brought forward from district councils in Oxfordshire, which include West Berkshire Council to mitigate some of the weaknesses identified in the options appraisal. We have not included West Berkshire in our options appraisal for the following reasons:

- It did not receive the statutory invitation from government on 9 February 2025 as it is not within an existing two tier county area. We have provided an option to government for Oxfordshire in response to the invitation to Oxfordshire councils.
- Any expansion of the area to encompass West Berkshire puts Oxfordshire at additional levels of unnecessary risk given it is currently in receipt of exceptional financial support from government.
- It would create a boundary change, effectively abolishing the ceremonial county of Oxfordshire that has a strong, well established national and international identity.
- It would also create an unnecessary, costly and temporary disaggregation of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service into a new combined fire authority either for Oxfordshire or joining with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service prior to the creation of a Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Service.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 1. Introduction

In addition, an independent financial options appraisal from PwC – which provides high level estimates of savings and costs from reorganisation (before being refined by any local factors) for two and three councils including West Berkshire – demonstrates that the single council for Oxfordshire still offers the most financially resilient option with the lowest transition costs.

It is, therefore, not in the interests of Oxfordshire residents, business communities or wider stakeholders, to create a principal authority with West Berkshire. There isn't clear evidence to suggest how inclusion of West Berkshire in Oxfordshire's reorganisation would contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing.

	Gross annual benefit	Additional annual costs	Recurring net annual benefit	One-off transition costs	Payback period	Net benefit after 1 year	Net benefit after 5 year
Single UA for all of Oxfordshire (Excluding West Berkshire)	£27.3m	£0	£27.3m	£23.8m	3.1 years	-£16.3m	£44.3m
2 UAs - Oxford & Shires and Ridgeway	£24.9m	£3.0m	£21.9m	£30.4m	4.2 years	-£24.9m	£16.6m
3 UAs - Greater Oxford, North Oxfordshire and Ridgeway	£20.2m	£10.7m	£9.5m	£32.5m	8.7 years	-£34.7m	-£35.5m

Our options appraisal shows that creating more than one council in Oxfordshire results in a weaker financial position, significant risk and a reduced ability to meet the government criteria.

The geography of one council for the whole of Oxfordshire also makes sense. Oxfordshire is a recognised and significant geography that has been used for successful public service design and delivery for many years. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint is strong and compelling.

As our options appraisal has demonstrated, there is strong alignment for One Oxfordshire with the government's criteria for reform, including its geography.

One Oxfordshire provides the optimal geography for a new council and we will demonstrate this using robust evidence and supporting data. We have considered our historic identity and opportunities to evolve this; democracy; demographics relevant for public service planning and delivery; our economy and connectivity; and our rich partnerships.

2. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint

2.1 Place

Geography and population

Oxfordshire is home to an estimated 763,218 people in 2024 and 31,755 businesses. One Oxfordshire will serve this population meeting the government's criteria for council size and as a single tier of local government.

Population estimates and housing forecasts

Area	ONS population estimates: Mid-2024[2]	2032 OCC housing-led forecasts
Cherwell	170,426	184,000
Oxford	166,034	170,700
South Oxfordshire	156,470	170,100
Vale of White Horse	149,347	166,600
West Oxfordshire	120,941	123,400
Oxfordshire (totals)	**763,218**	**814,700**

Oxfordshire is a predominantly rural county, the least populated in the south-east, covering 260,595 hectares.

It hosts protected national landscapes, areas of strategic value to nature, including national nature reserves and sites of special scientific interest[4], as well as the Thames Path and Ridgeway national trails. There is a strong, interconnected network of thriving villages and market towns, with the historic city of Oxford at its heart.

Oxfordshire's geography supports its coherence and connection. The county is bounded and shaped by natural features like the Chiltern Hills, Cotswolds, the River Thames and its transport infrastructure (A34, M40, rail links, bus network). The county has over 4,200 km of roads and over 4.79 billion vehicle miles were travelled on them in 2024[5]. Major rail and road transport links reinforce internal connectivity, providing a foundation for growth within the new economy, across Bicester, Oxford and Didcot[6]. Oxfordshire is both a ceremonial county and an administrative one with boundaries that are the same.

While Oxfordshire boasts natural beauty, it does pose flooding risks. Local authority responsibility for flood management is currently divided between county and district councils. The Oxfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy[7] identifies flooding from rivers, notably the Thames and its tributaries as the primary source of flood risk. Historically, this means Burford and Witney in West Oxfordshire, Abingdon and Henley-on-Thames in South Oxfordshire, Banbury and Kidlington in Cherwell, and Oxford face particular risk of properties being impacted and damaged from flooding[8].

One Oxfordshire will enable a consistent approach to flood preparedness and response across the whole of the county. We will empower communities to work with local councillors and the council on building local awareness and hyper-local resilience hubs to take action to protect homes and communities most affected. The county council already has countywide experience and strong relationships forged within the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum to continue to respond to incidents on a small or large geographical scale.

Historic identity and opportunity

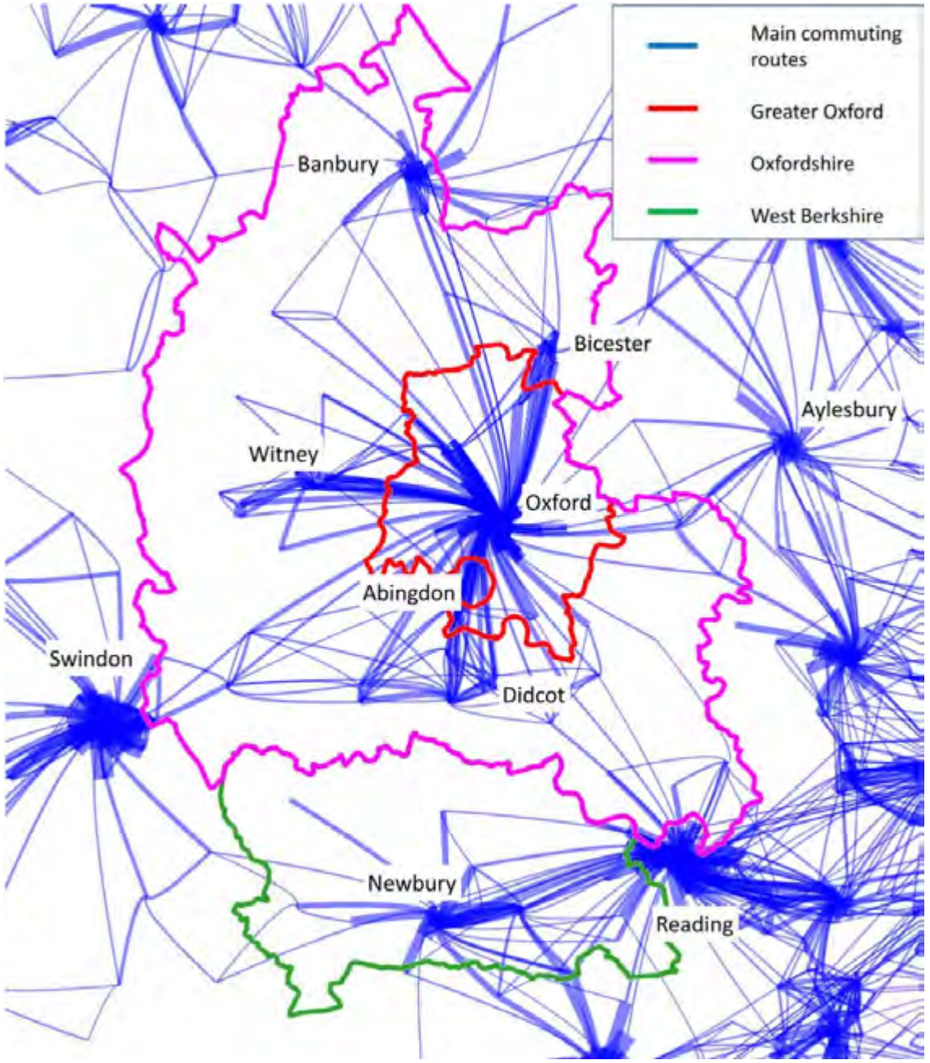
Oxfordshire is bordered by Northamptonshire and Warwickshire to the north, Buckinghamshire to the east, Berkshire to the south, and Wiltshire and Gloucestershire to the west. Oxford city is the largest settlement. Anchored on the Thames, it lies between the Cotswolds to the west, Chilterns and the North Wessex Downs to the south and the Cherwell Valley in the north.

Oxfordshire was first recorded as a county more than 1,000 years ago with Oxfordshire County Council established in 1889. In 1974, the current borders and powers for the county council, the four shire district councils – Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, West Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse – were created, as well as Oxford City Council, previously a self-governing county borough.

The northern boundary of Berkshire was historically defined by the River Thames, which flows through the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire. Following the redrawing of boundaries in 1974, communities served by their county town, Abingdon, were added into the administrative county of Oxfordshire. In practical terms, this is the area covered by Vale of White Horse District Council and part of South Oxfordshire District Council.

This incorporation of parts of Berkshire into Oxfordshire was not arbitrary. The Thames and the North Wessex Downs acts as a natural barrier and there is relatively little economic interaction north to south between the Vale of White Horse and West Berkshire. This is evidenced by limited travel to work activity and home to school transport, the latter comprising only 8.8 per cent of origin destination trips compared to 85.6 per cent within the county footprint[9].

Oxford travel to work area[10]



University of Oxford

Oxford

Critical to the historic identity of Oxfordshire is Oxford, with the University of Oxford playing a strong role in shaping the growth and development of the city since its foundation – the exact year of which is unknown, but pre-dates 1096[11]. Despite this clear Oxford brand, there are key interactions and connections between the different parts of the county, which enable the city to thrive and perpetuate its global identity.

One Oxfordshire will maintain and strengthen existing connections through a new, single council for all Oxfordshire residents, businesses, institutions and investors. It will maintain the links between our great universities and organisations developing advanced technology, including our science campuses at Begbroke, Culham, Harwell and Milton Park so that our county can drive innovation and inclusive growth across the region.

The county council's groundbreaking research alliances with Oxford's universities (and University College London) are already bridging the gap between research and practice to deliver evidence-based policy making at scale and with impact ensuring that we can test, learn and grow services rooted in what works.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 2. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint

Visitor economy

The county's visitor economy is worth £2.4 billion and sustains 41,000 jobs (11 per cent of total employment in Oxfordshire[12]).

It is home to a wide variety of well-known brands including Blenheim Palace, Bicester Village and the Cotswolds. Established attractions such as Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Henley Regatta and the Wilderness Festival will be joined over the coming years by major new attractions such as the proposed Puy du Fou and the Great Wolf Lodge, bringing even greater visitor numbers to Oxfordshire.

These brands are supported by a wider ecosystem of retail, leisure and hospitality businesses, market towns and natural assets that collectively make Oxfordshire an internationally significant tourist destination.

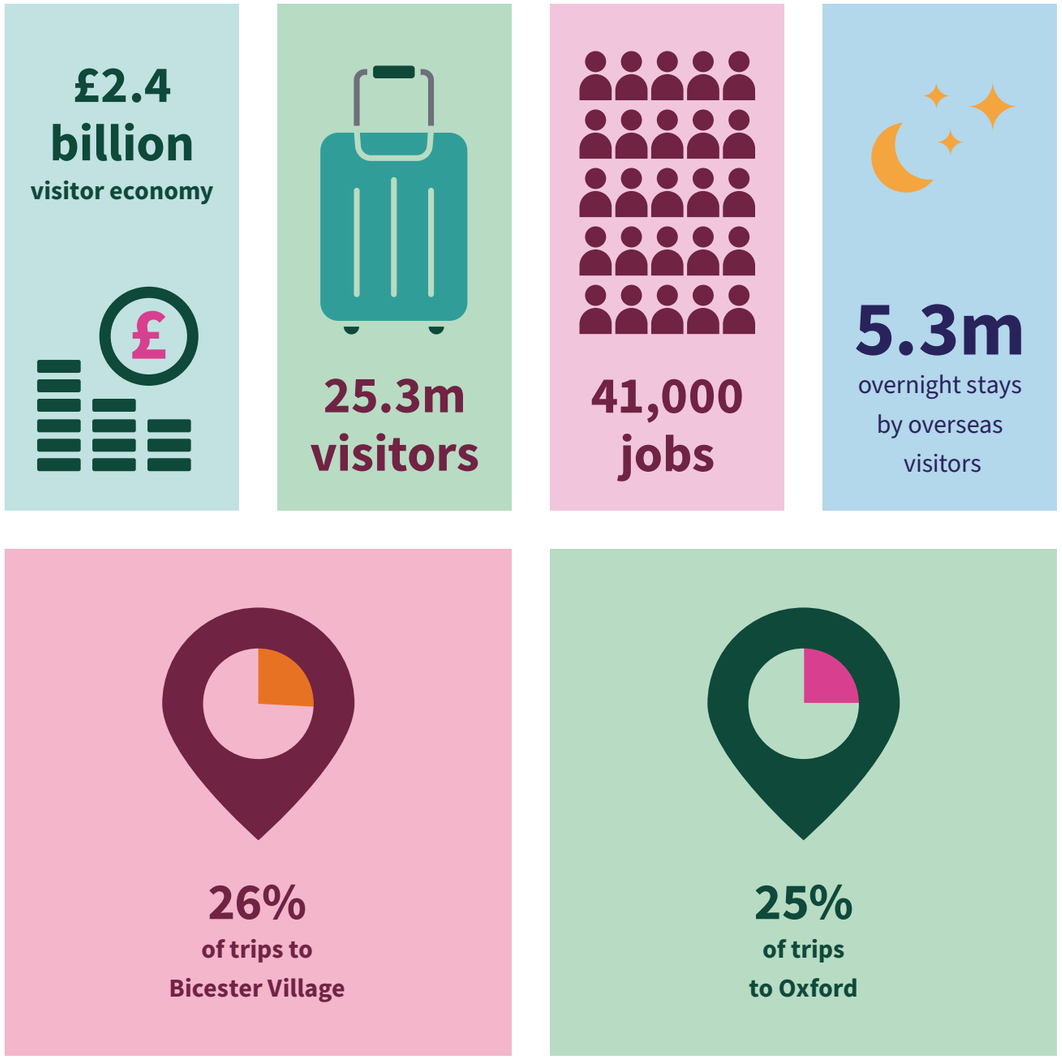
In 2024 alone, Oxfordshire welcomed 25.3 million visitors spending 9.7 million nights in the county, with more overseas visitors (5.3m) than domestic (4.4m). Importantly, Cherwell (home to Bicester Village) received as many visitors (26 per cent of trips) as Oxford city (25 per cent)[13].

The city supports a tourism industry comprising seven million daytime and staying visitors per year, generating £780 million of income[14] for local Oxford businesses.

In 2021, Oxford was the ninth most visited city from overseas staying visits in the UK. Protecting the image of Oxford and its valued tourism industry is critical to the ongoing economic success of the city. With a large geographic footprint, One Oxfordshire can be more strategic in how Oxford flourishes allowing it to more effectively protect a familiar, globally recognisable image that attracts visitors from around the world.

Support for our visitor economy is currently fragmented across six local authorities and one destination management organisation – which leads to duplicated effort, inconsistent branding and competitive marketing. Experience Oxfordshire's 2023 visitor survey highlighted poor transport links and a lack of awareness of the county's offer as key reasons not to visit[15].

One Oxfordshire will better enable the sustainable growth of the county's visitor economy. We will do this by improving transport integration, delivering economies of scale in marketing, investing at scale in countywide cultural experiences, and targeting support for the whole system through planning, business and employment support. Ultimately, this will enable Oxfordshire to attract and retain more visitors.



"Take away Oxfordshire and you remove a cornerstone of continuity, identity and resilience."

(Oxfordshire resident, investor and business owner)

Democracy

Elections to a council representing Oxfordshire have occurred since 1889 and are part of our democratic tradition and identity, one recognised by Oxfordshire's residents.

The county council's long-standing leadership and delivery of county elections across districts, consolidating efforts into a single Oxfordshire team, is a demonstration of our collective abilities to lead and deliver electoral events at scale.

Since 2017[16], county council elections in Oxfordshire have averaged a turnout of 38.1 per cent. This figure is above the English average for county election turnouts during the same period (35.3 per cent) and represents a comparatively good level of democratic engagement and recognition of county-based democracy. This turnout level exceeds those of all English unitary authorities in equivalent electoral years (35.5 per cent). Building from this strong foundation of democratic engagement, One Oxfordshire will offer streamlined, unified governance that can strengthen this further.

County local election turnout mean averages[16]

Election year	Oxfordshire County Council	All English county local authorities	All English unitary councils
2017	38.5	35.3	37.6
2021	40.1	36.3	34.8
2025	35.6	34.3	34.0
Average turnout	**38.1**	**35.3**	**35.5**

One Oxfordshire will leverage a sense of place through the continuity of a democratic organisation that electors recognise. It provides stability and requires no boundary changes.

One Oxfordshire propels this remarkable county forward through a new council enriched with all local government functions. We will bring residents, businesses and institutions together and strengthen connections to the communities they recognise.

We believe that a governance model that respects and reflects this is more likely to succeed in strengthening democracy in Oxfordshire.

2.2 People

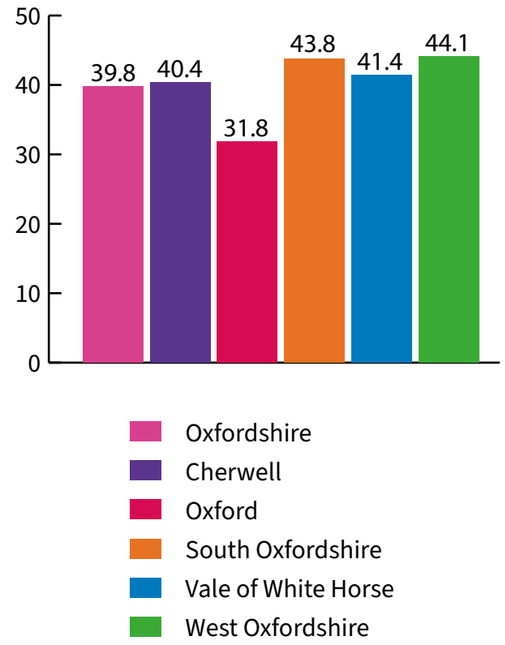
Age profiles

Oxfordshire residents have a similar age profile across district areas with the exception of Oxford, which is substantially lower. This relates to the number of 18 - 22 year olds linked to the city's large student population. There are also a number of Oxford residents under the age of 40 who migrate out of the city into the county's towns and rural areas, which reduces the city's average age[17].

Life expectancy in Oxfordshire is better than national averages. Males in all districts have a statistically significantly better life expectancy than the rest of the country at 79.3 years with Oxford the lowest at 80.6 years through to South Oxfordshire with an average of 82.7 years[19]. Female life expectancy in Cherwell and Oxford is marginally above the England average of 83.2 years, whereas South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire all average over 85 years of age[20].

Oxfordshire has a broadly similar population base in terms of age and ethnicity[21] in all districts with the exception of Oxford, which has a younger average population and greater ethnic diversity amongst its residents.

ONS median population age: Oxfordshire and district council areas (mid-2024)[18]



Deprivation

Oxfordshire is the tenth least deprived of 151 upper tier local authorities in England[22]. Only 16.4 per cent of locations in Oxfordshire are within the 50 per cent more deprived locations within England, and of these only 0.2 per cent are within the most deprived category. By comparison, 26.3 per cent of areas in Oxfordshire are in the least deprived group with a further 20.9 per cent in the second least deprived group[23].

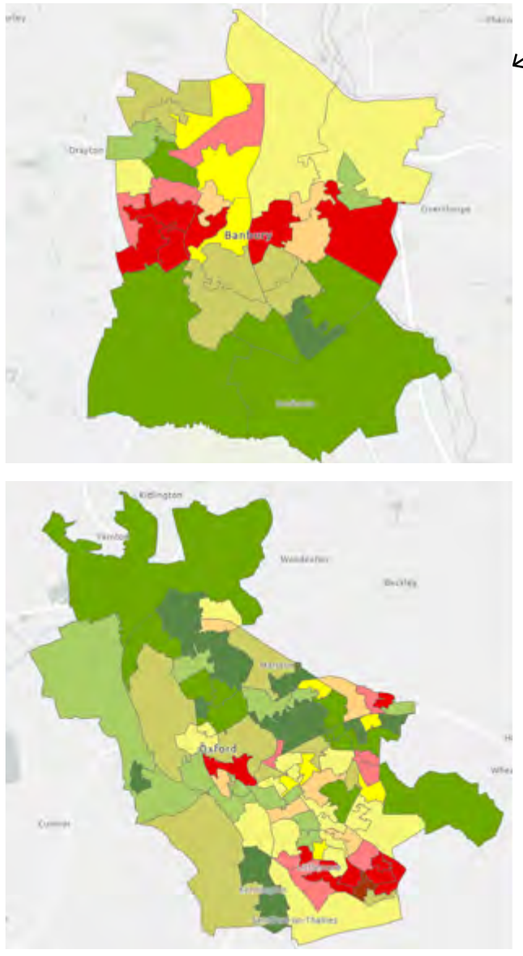
Although there are relatively few areas of deprivation, Oxfordshire has ten communities ranked in the 20 per cent most deprived in England[24] masking deep inequalities across the county.

One Oxfordshire will tackle these inequalities by building on and progressing existing exemplar work led by the county council's public health team, as well as utilising partnerships and new alliances.

One such alliance is the Local Policy Lab formed in March 2024 between the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University and the county council. The lab aims to bridge the gap between research and local policy by building meaningful and long-lasting connections between local public policy makers, communities and academic researchers. It will support evidence-based public policy in key areas, initially focusing on health and climate policy.

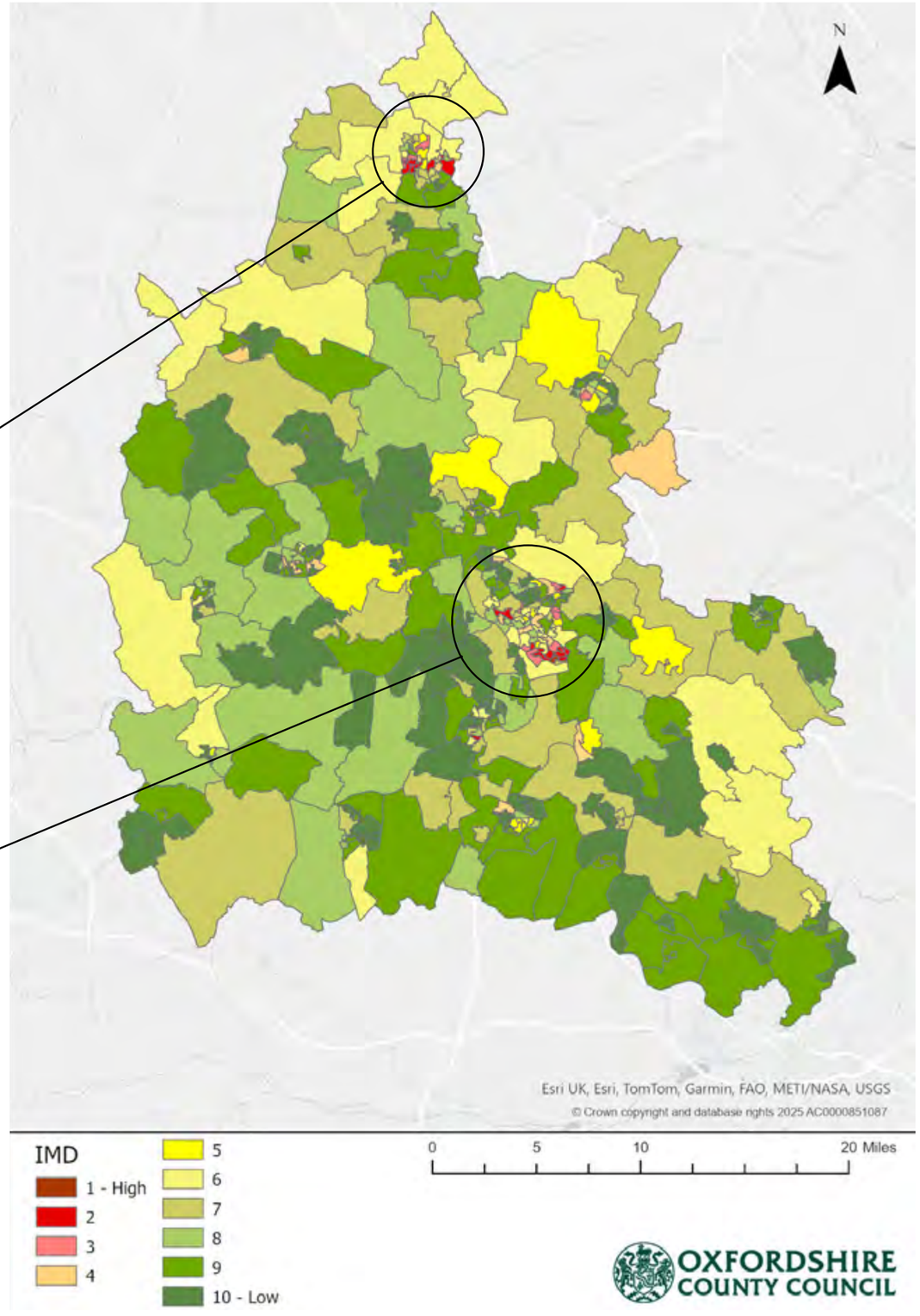
Recently, the county council signed up to developing Oxfordshire as a Marmot Place[26] using academic and research expertise to help us better understand what actions will reduce health inequality.

Strategic approaches, such as addressing health inequalities through the Marmot programme, are more efficiently delivered at a county level. A single point of conversation with key partners will lead to more efficient outcomes across a complex health space including public health; adult and children's social care; research partners; contracted services; and national and sub-national bodies such as the Thames Valley Integrated Care Board. One Oxfordshire can build a more diverse range of experiences and develop strategy that can flex for local needs as appropriate.



Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 2. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint

Deprivation in Oxfordshire[25]



Reducing health inequalities in Blackbird Leys

Oxfordshire, despite its reputation for being wealthy and privileged, is facing stark inequalities.

A child born in Blackbird Leys will live 13 years less than a child born in the richest parts of the county, and residents living in Blackbird Leys often face multiple barriers to living an active life. Thanks to the strength of local partnerships, there is excellent work underway to get more residents active and tackle these embedded inequalities head on.

Sport England has invested £630,000 into Oxfordshire between 2025 - 2028 to enable long-term systemic changes in how inequalities are tackled and physical activity increased. The county council has directly funded Active Oxfordshire to help drive this place-based approach in our most deprived communities. Funding is being used to turbocharge this local work in Blackbird Leys to strengthen connections, share learnings and create even more long-term impact.

Pride in Place

Greater Leys will receive £20 million over ten years through the Pride in Place programme to tackle deprivation and improve quality of life.

The funding will deliver a locally agreed regeneration plan focused on three priorities: community facilities; public spaces; and safety. Planned investments include refurbishing Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys community centres, upgrading play areas and green spaces, and improving cycle and walking routes to connect residents with jobs and services.

High street improvements will support local businesses, while targeted measures will address anti-social behaviour and enhance lighting and CCTV. A neighbourhood board – made up of councillors, MPs and residents – will oversee delivery and ensure projects reflect community priorities. The programme also aims to boost skills and employment through training hubs and partnerships with local employers.

By creating safer streets, better amenities, and stronger community networks, the initiative seeks to make Greater Leys a thriving, inclusive neighbourhood. One unitary council will be able to use the strength of its connections and scale to support such partnership work, making funding work harder and reach wider across communities.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 2. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint

Oxfordshire's Marmot approach[26]

Where people are born, live, grow, work and get older has the biggest influence on health and health inequalities.

The county council has partnered with the University College London's Institute of Health Equity to become a Marmot Place.

This means we've committed to tackling health inequalities and improving health fairness in Oxfordshire by working with local partners across the system.

These include local authorities, communities, public services, businesses, and voluntary sector organisations.

The programme aims to create a fairer and healthier Oxfordshire and is initially focusing on three of the eight Marmot principles:

- Give every child the best start in life.
- Create fair employment and good work for all.
- Ensure a healthy standard of living for all.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot

2.3 Partnerships

Oxfordshire partnerships and organisations

Local government cannot meet the needs of our people alone. Collaboration isn't just an option, it's how we lift everyone across the county. We need effective, long-term partnerships to design and deliver public services and advocate for our shared interests locally, nationally and internationally.

One of the biggest strengths of Oxfordshire's current system is its amazing network of partnerships and organisations across the county strengthened after the COVID pandemic. One Oxfordshire has the opportunity to leverage these relationships to become a partner of choice. We will actively seek and develop mature and purposeful relationships with our strategic partners that drive improved outcomes for the county's residents.

A snapshot of the partnerships and organisations that have a significant role and impact across Oxfordshire include.

Examples of partnerships and statutory organisations working across Oxfordshire:

Experience Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils

Oxfordshire Care Partnership

Oxfordshire Children's Trust

Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership

Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service (run by A2Dominion)

Oxfordshire Football Association

Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board

Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance

Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership

Oxfordshire SEND Local Area Partnership

Oxfordshire Prevention and Health Inequalities Forum

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership

Oxfordshire System Urgent Care Delivery Group

Oxfordshire Urgent and Emergency Care Board

Zero Carbon Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 2. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint

Other Oxfordshire organisations:

Active Oxfordshire

Age UK Oxfordshire

Aspire Oxfordshire

Citizens Advice Oxfordshire

Community First Oxfordshire

Experience Oxfordshire

Homelessness Oxfordshire

My Vision Oxfordshire

Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action

Oxfordshire Community Foundation

Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association

Rural Broadband Oxfordshire

Wild Oxfordshire

These examples of countywide partnerships delivering vital statutory and voluntary services support the need to maintain an Oxfordshire footprint for local government reorganisation using existing networks to create stronger, simpler public services.

> **In 2024, the first single coherent place narrative for Oxfordshire was jointly designed and developed across a number of partners and organisations and was endorsed by the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (now the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee). It provides an excellent framework for system-wide collaboration with all those who have a vested interest in the future success of the county.**

The future of innovative, asset-based and responsive service delivery across a place has to be characterised by a coherent, sustainable voluntary and community sector working collaboratively with a single council.

The creation of small unitaries would lead to unnecessary disruption for our partners, which they have shared with us. This will require charities to readjust to new boundaries and potentially create competition between those in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

Regional partnerships

There are also many cross boundary partnerships that work beyond Oxfordshire. Examples include Thames Valley Integrated Care Board, Thames Valley Police, Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum and Adopt Thames Valley – a regional adoption agency led by the county council at the request of the Department for Education. The agency covers seven local authorities (Oxfordshire, Swindon and five unitary authorities of Berkshire – not Slough) and two voluntary adoption agencies.

Oxfordshire's strong economy is the southern anchor of England's Economic Heartland (EEH)[27], a sub-national transport body. EEH is a partnership grouping of the principal authority leaders from Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Cambridgeshire, Milton Keynes, Luton, Peterborough, Bedford and Central Bedfordshire and wider economic leaders[28]. EEH is credited with making significant and fast progress in bringing together transport authority and former local enterprise partnership areas.

The Oxford Growth Commission was established in spring 2025 by government to review how best to unlock and accelerate growth in the city and surrounding area. Its vision is to support the delivery of infrastructure, housing and employment to unleash Oxford's and Oxfordshire's economic power, accelerating growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, and across the UK. The commission has been clear on the need for strategic planning on a footprint beyond current districts and its work has been able to focus on opportunities that cross current and potential future boundaries.

In April 2025, the chancellor of the exchequer visited Siemens Healthineers in Eynsham, West Oxfordshire, to discuss the significant economic opportunity presented by the development of a growth corridor between Oxford and Cambridge. She noted that this initiative has the potential to contribute up to £78 billion to the UK economy over the next decade, primarily through the support of science and technology enterprises located along the 66 mile corridor.

Delivery of the Oxfordshire end of the growth corridor, starting with investment in transport infrastructure, stands to benefit from the presence of a single unitary authority for the county. One Oxfordshire offers a streamlined governance structure within a geographic footprint to deliver major transport and other infrastructure for the area[29]. All regional partnerships stand to benefit from the strength and simplicity of a single council for Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 2. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint

Diamond Light Source - Harwell

2.4 Economy and connectivity

Oxfordshire is one of the UK's most economically resilient and strategically significant regions. At a local authority level, Oxfordshire is only one of four county areas nationally that is a net contributor to the UK exchequer[30]. The county boasts low unemployment, a self-contained labour market and a geographically distributed, highly-skilled resident and enterprise base. This stretches from the north to the south of the county across the Knowledge Spine – the county's central economic corridor for breakthrough businesses and innovation.

The Knowledge Spine

Oxfordshire's Knowledge Spine connects three key growth areas: Bicester (Cherwell); Oxford city; and the Science Vale (South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse), which includes the science and technology parks around Bicester, Kidlington, Oxford, Abingdon, Didcot, Wantage and Grove. This corridor is the backbone of Oxfordshire's innovation ecosystem and a key area for high-skill employment and enterprise growth.

Its internationally significant business footprint includes clusters in life sciences, space, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing, all of which are deeply embedded across the county's geography, contributing to national missions and influencing global markets and supply chains.

Oxfordshire's research and commercialisation capabilities are helping to solve global challenges from pandemic response to climate resilience, while simultaneously driving growth in other UK regions through collaborative projects and technology diffusion.

Oxfordshire's critical economic sectors, assets and growth opportunities[31]

Source: Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy.

Cambridge Econometrics

Economic growth

The county is vital to the government's mission to kickstart economic growth – One Oxfordshire plays a critical role in supporting this – simple governance, single strategies.

Headline economic indicators further reinforce Oxfordshire's strategic importance. The county generates £29.3 billion in gross value added (GVA) annually[32] and supports 430,000 jobs[33]. Oxfordshire has demonstrated exceptional economic resilience and growth. It recorded the fastest growing economy of any local enterprise partnership area following the 2008 recession, with GVA increasing over 26 per cent between 2009 and 2015. More recently Oxfordshire's GVA rose by a further 19 per cent between 2020 to 2023[34]. It hosts the highest concentration of science research facilities in Western Europe and has attracted over £3.1 billion in foreign direct investment since 2017[35].

Major commitments from global firms including Moderna, BMW and GIC Singapore have been made to Oxfordshire. One of the county's most established and recognised institutions, the University of Oxford, has spun out over 200 companies through its innovation arm, collectively valued at £6.4 billion and representing 16 per cent of all UK university spinouts. The university joins Oxfordshire's Knowledge Spine, with the Science Vale and science parks, for creating opportunities to strengthen the county's economic growth.

On a national level, Oxfordshire's economic coherence has long been recognised by central government. In 2011, Oxfordshire was designated as one of the few counties to have its own local enterprise partnership, forming the basis for city deals that acknowledged Oxfordshire's unique economic strengths.

A unified approach through One Oxfordshire will support the county's economic foundations and enhance its capacity to drive national growth through innovation and expertise. Evidence is already compelling that Oxfordshire's economic success, specifically through advanced research and development has created significant supply-chain, employment and growth in all other regions of the UK. This could potentially be stalled if economic coherence is lost through disaggregation and reduced scale.

Labour market and employment

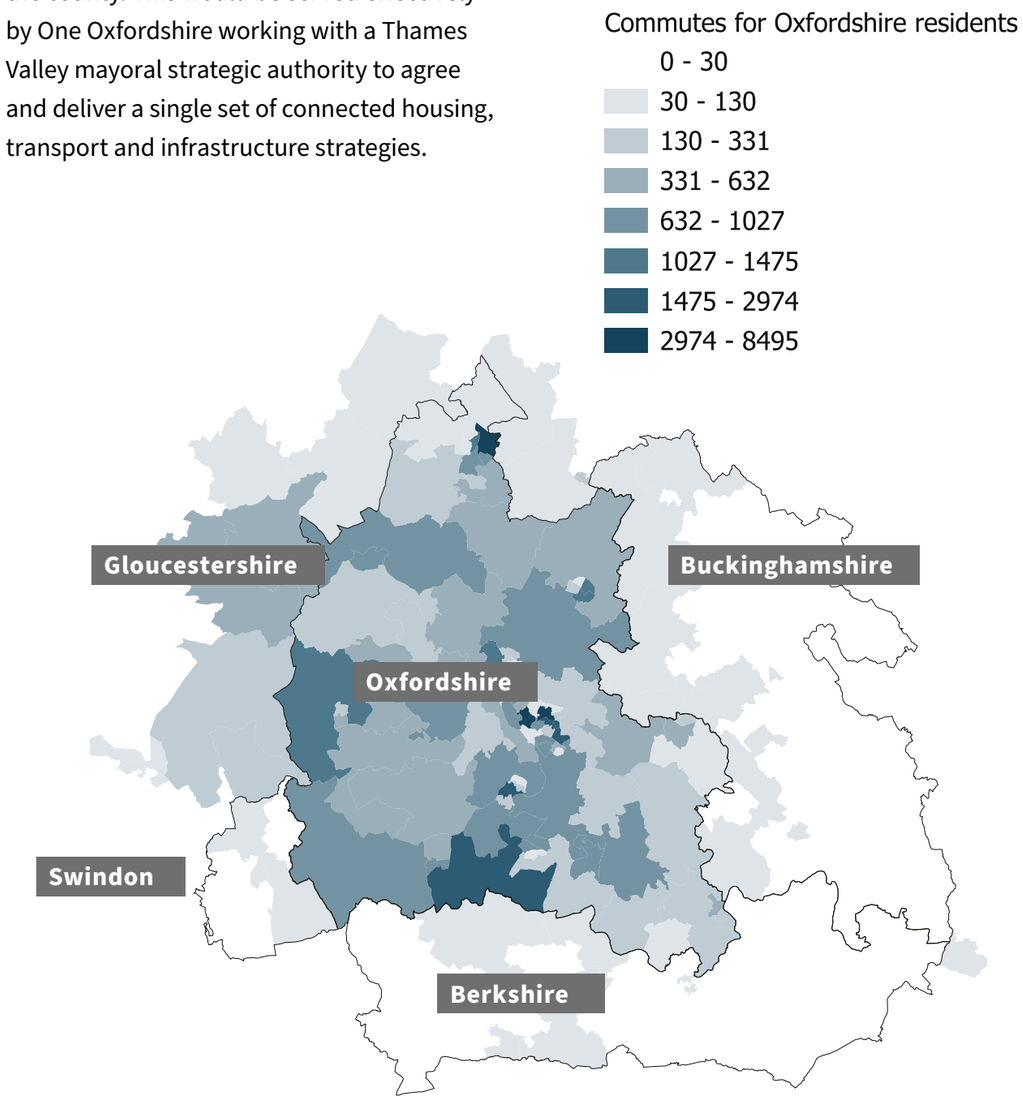
Oxfordshire is, on balance, an affluent county. Like life expectancy, gross median weekly pay is above the national average in all districts with South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse being Oxfordshire's most affluent areas[36].

Oxfordshire's higher than average income is, in part, due to the knowledge and innovation-led ecosystem previously outlined. It is also underpinned by a highly educated workforce, of which over 56 per cent are qualified to degree level or above. The concentration of employment in research and development is four times the national average[37].

Oxfordshire's commuter patterns reveal a highly integrated and self-contained labour market, with Oxford serving as the major employment hub. Census data (2021) shows that 85 per cent of Oxfordshire residents work within the county[38] – well above the Office for National Statistics' self-containment threshold of 75 per cent[39]. Accounting for both inbound and outbound commuting flows, Oxfordshire maintains a net commuter inflow of approximately 9,000 people[40]. These findings confirm that Oxfordshire's labour market is largely self-contained, with only marginal overlaps at its boundaries.

The county's concentration of commuting forms evidence to support a distributed and inclusive approach to growth across the county. This would be served effectively by One Oxfordshire working with a Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority to agree and deliver a single set of connected housing, transport and infrastructure strategies.

Travel to work analysis in Oxfordshire, 2021 Census[41]



Oxfordshire has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the UK. There is only one unemployed person for every 32 people who are working[42] (excluding people who are inactive, including those who are retired, long-term sick and students). Notably almost 50 per cent who are inactive are students.[43]

Following the direct impact of COVID on the employment market, from 2022 onwards the majority of Oxfordshire's unemployment rate has been three per cent or lower compared to the UK average at four per cent or higher. Although the Oxford unemployment rate is the highest amongst district areas, it has remained more than 1 per cent under the England average[44]. As a result of distributed growth facilitating an environment that generates employment opportunity to all residents, irrespective of geography, all areas of the county have significantly stronger employment rates than the national average.

However, labour productivity has declined post-COVID in Oxfordshire. This weakening reflects pressures seen across all local economies – rising housing and land costs, fragmented transport networks, skills mismatches and health inequalities.

Oxfordshire's strong economy is one of its greatest assets, but its value needs to spread more widely and a focus on inclusive growth seized. It also needs to re-establish an upward trend in productivity. To do this requires One Oxfordshire functioning as a single connected system. By providing clear countywide governance, joined up infrastructure delivery and ensuring that transport is embedded in a single set of plans and strategies, stronger levels of productivity can be unlocked across Oxfordshire.

This will undoubtedly turbocharge the unlocking of the productivity puzzle at a mayoral strategic authority level too. We will convert complementary strengths across the Thames Valley into cross-boundary supply chains, deeper labour markets and quicker diffusion of innovation, and with that, a return to sustained productivity growth and, therefore, revenue to UK PLC.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 2. The case for an Oxfordshire footprint

Oxfordshire, as outlined, is one of the UK's most economically resilient and strategically significant counties. We have an abundance of assets and skills but need a strong and viable local government structure to connect and drive further growth and opportunity for Oxfordshire. This means we need a strong, financially resilient council to deliver reform from day one. We need One Oxfordshire to deliver that council. It is the only model that will deliver a financially resilient and sustainable council.

Bicester Village

3. Financial resilience

3.1 Financial overview

Local government reform in Oxfordshire will take place in the context of a decade of austerity, significant service demand and cost pressures, economic vulnerabilities, global uncertainties as well as the Fair Funding Review 2.0. Despite all of this, given the relative budget and proportion of services provided and very strong and consistent financial position of Oxfordshire County Council, One Oxfordshire will be able to manage the existing and future financial challenges for all predecessor councils in Oxfordshire confidently and in full, which many other parts of the country cannot.

One Oxfordshire will also provide the most strategic approach to service delivery enabling investment at scale across the whole of Oxfordshire to drive innovation, public sector reform and devolution ambitions. It is the strongest option in which to confidently manage financial risks in an uncertain future operating environment.

Based on the financial modelling undertaken independently by PwC[45], savings that will be delivered just by creating one single unitary council are estimated to be **£30.1 million** per year. The cost of transition to a new council is estimated to be a one-off sum of **£21.9 million**. There are no ongoing costs or financial asks of government associated with the proposal for One Oxfordshire. Based on the cost/benefit analysis summarised below, **the payback period for One Oxfordshire will be approximately 1.3 years.**

Transformation and future innovation are most successfully achieved when built on firm foundations. The creation of One Oxfordshire will offer clarity and consistency in governance, eliminating fragmentation and leveraging best practices to ensure cohesive and effective service delivery.

One Oxfordshire can create the firmest foundations to develop a highly ambitious transformation and public service reform agenda to enable this place, and our people, to thrive.

Beyond transition, a single unitary council for Oxfordshire will be able to generate further annual savings through transformation of **£33.2 million** a year by year five. One-off costs of transformation are expected to be **£16.6 million**.

Savings that will be delivered by one single unitary council are estimated to be £63.3 million per year with total net savings of £162.6 million by year five.

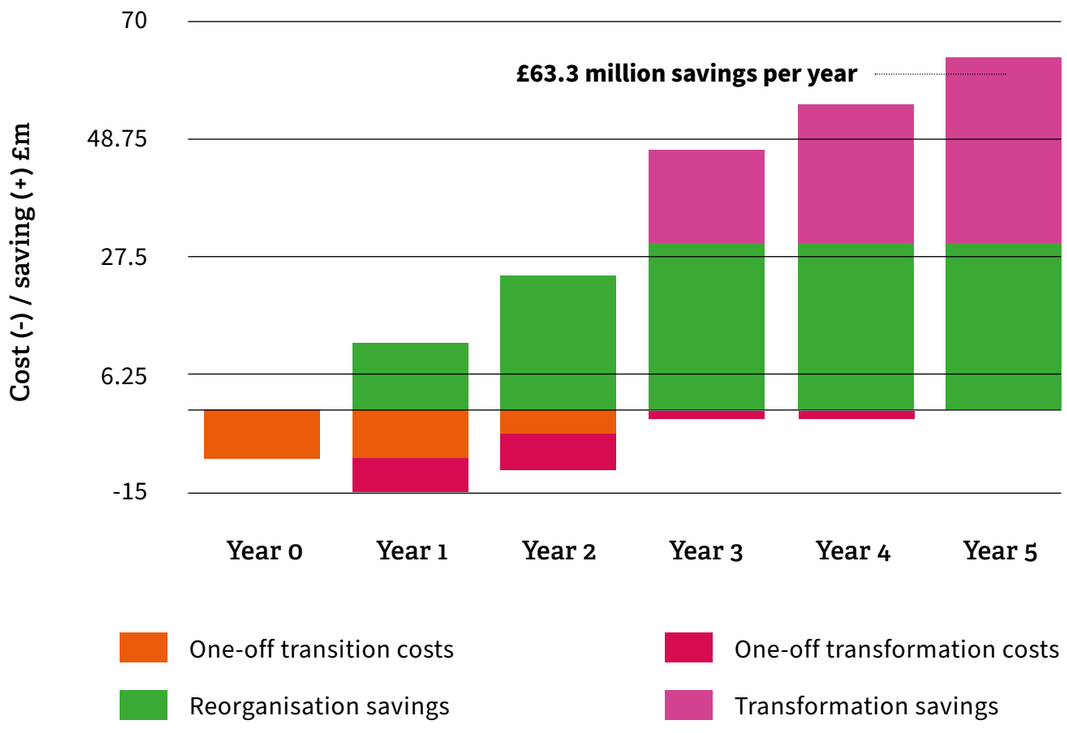
The financial case for a single council across Oxfordshire is clear. It will provide the quickest, greatest savings from reorganisation and public sector reform without the need for complex, unnecessary and risky disaggregation and associated costs.

In comparison to the two and three unitary options proposed for Oxfordshire (and encompassing West Berkshire Council, which has received exceptional financial support from the government in 2024/25 and 2025/26) One Oxfordshire is the most financially resilient option, creating the best opportunity to deliver future transformation savings, able to withstand and manage financial shocks.

We will drive confidence among residents, stakeholders, businesses and investors across Oxfordshire, the sub-region, nationally and internationally, and enable this county to invest at scale in its people and its places.

A financially stable and economically strong council will be well placed to attract investors and harness the potential Oxfordshire has in terms of economic development, regeneration and growth.

One Oxfordshire costs and savings



3.2 Overall approach, methodology and assumptions

The county council commissioned PwC to undertake the financial case and modelling for One Oxfordshire. PwC is a professional services consultancy experienced in major public sector transformation, including local government reorganisation. PwC used its evidence base to model a top-down review of potential costs and benefits from reorganisation and transformation, as well as assess the reasonableness of the draft financial considerations.

Challenge and assurance have been provided by an independent senior finance professional – previously the shadow section 151 officer for a council that successfully transitioned to become a unitary authority – based on their practical experience of what has been actually achieved through reorganisation. This included reviewing modelling principles, tolerances and an assessment of materiality in determining what was proportionate and should be included.

The financial case for One Oxfordshire, as well as the other Oxfordshire business cases, have used medium term financial strategies for 2025/26 as well as the 2024/25 revenue account expenditure (revenue outturn - RO data) as the basis for its financial modelling. Where relevant, other data sets have been used and these have been agreed across all councils and used consistently.

The county council's RO expenditure, medium term financial strategy and council tax baselines currently include costs and funding for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. In the longer-term these will sit with the mayoral strategic authority so third party spend and assets for the fire service are assumed to not be addressable.[45]

In line with guidance, the financial modelling has been completed at today's prices, not considering the impact of inflation and not discounting future cash flows.

Each of the individual savings, additional costs and transition costs have been phased by year, based on when it is anticipated these will be realised or incurred. Some transition costs will be incurred ahead of vesting day (these are shown in year 0) and are included in the overall costs, savings and payback period. The financial case has been modelled over a five year period from vesting day.

One Oxfordshire delivers the best value for money for the Oxfordshire taxpayer.

3.3 Financial appraisal

Financial baseline

The indicative budget for 2027/28 based on existing medium term financial strategies that will form the revenue baseline for One Oxfordshire in April 2028 is £907 million.

There is an overall anticipated deficit of £9.6 million by vesting day. Additionally, there is currently a planned use of one-off contributions from reserves or general balances of £15.5 million to balance budgets ahead of vesting day. The expectation is that action will be taken to set budgets that are balanced, robust and deliverable by each council ahead of vesting day.

Expenditure	**2027/28**
Pay	£275.4m
Non pay	£631.2m
Total	**£906.6m**
Funding (before funding reform)	**2027/28**
Council tax	£661.3m
Non-ringfenced grants	£83.2m
Business rates	£137.0m
Total	**£881.5m**
Deficit	**£25.1m**
Use of reserves and balances	£15.5m
Remaining deficit to manage	**£9.6m**

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Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 3. Financial resilience

Reorganisation savings

Financial modelling shows that recurring revenue savings of **£30.1 million** will be achieved by a single unitary council for Oxfordshire as a direct result of local government reorganisation. These savings fall into four categories.

Savings	
Employees	£20.4m
Third party spend	£4.2m
Democracy	£2.1m
Property	£3.4m
Total	**£30.1m**

Employees:

Leadership:
A reduction in senior leadership costs as a result of reducing duplication of senior posts (savings realised in year one).

Delivery:
The benefit arising from the removal of duplication of front office, back office and service delivery roles (savings realised years one to three).

Property:

Benefits from reduced property expenditure arising from the rationalisation of office, depot and vehicle assets (savings realised years one to three).

The achievement of savings will be phased based on expected realisation as set out below.

Third party spend:

There are benefits from the reduction in addressable spend through the aggregation of contracts. This is assumed to be mainly from spend where there is duplication of existing spend across the existing councils (savings realised years one to three).

At this stage no direct savings from adult or children's social care are assumed as the existing level of expenditure for both services is relatively low compared to Oxfordshire comparator councils.

Democracy:

The largest benefit is from a reduction in election costs and member allowances as a result of needing a reduced number of overall councillors in a single unitary council (savings realised year one).

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**
Recurring reorganisation savings	£12.0m	£24.1m	£30.1m	£30.1m	£30.1m
Phasing	40%	80%	100%	100%	100%

Transition costs

One-off transition costs needed to create One Oxfordshire are expected to be **£21.9 million**, the details of which are set out in the table below.

One-off transition costs	Total
Programme management costs	-£2.7m
IT and systems costs	-£5.2m
External transition, design and implementation support costs	-£4.1m
Shadow democratic and legal costs	-£1.8m
Redundancy costs (30% of estimated employee savings)	-£6.1m
Contingency	-£2.0m
Total	**-£21.9m**

Some of the transition costs will be incurred ahead of vesting day (year 0) with further spend in year one and two. The phasing of these costs is set out in the table below.

	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Total
One-off transition costs	-£8.8m	-£8.8m	-£4.3m	**-£21.9m**
Phasing	40%	40%	20%	

While these one-off costs will be repaid through reorganisation savings, Oxfordshire County Council has already committed £10 million from earmarked reserves, which can be used towards the cost of local government reform and devolution (£1.2 million of which will be used for devolution). It is expected that the year 0 transition costs will be met from this reserve. Therefore, recurring savings from reorganisation will start in year one.

	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Transition costs	-£8.8m	-£8.8m	-£4.3m	•	•	•	**-£21.9m**
Use of earmarked reserves	£8.8m	•	•	•	•	•	**£8.8m**
Reorganisation savings	•	£12.0m	£24.1m	£30.1m	£30.1m	£30.1m	**£126.4m**
Adjusted reorganisation savings	•	**£3.2m**	**£19.8m**	**£30.1m**	**£30.1m**	**£30.1m**	**£113.3m**

Transformation and public service reform

The establishment of Oxfordshire Council will provide the opportunity to transform service delivery models. Transformation and economic growth opportunities will be delivered by integrating upper tier and lower tier services in a systematic way.

We will unify distinct waste services, create a person centred homelessness service and connect planning, housing and highways. We will connect leisure with public health and drive innovation by using data and insight from benefits to provide targeted early help and prevention.

Estimated recurring revenue savings of **£33.2 million** through transformation can be achieved by year five. A very prudent level of savings has been assumed to reflect the savings programmes already planned by existing councils ahead of vesting day, the expected funding reductions as a result of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 and business rates reset, as well as evidence from previous reorganisations.

There is the ability to stretch the potential savings from transformation to achieve £40.6 million per annum by year five, taking total annual savings to £70.7 million. But for the reasons set out above, this has not been assumed in this proposal.

Transformation savings are expected across the following areas:

Transformation saving	
Front office employees	£2.7m
Service delivery employees	£2.9m
Back office employees	£3.4m
Third party expenditure	£21.0m
Income generation	£2.1m
Assets – running costs	£1.1m
Total	**£33.2m**

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 3. Financial resilience

To enable the transformation savings to be achieved, it is anticipated that there will be one-off delivery costs of £16.6 million as detailed in the table below.

Transformation costs	
Delivery resource	-£6.9m
Investment costs (eg IT and software)	-£5.5m
Redundancy costs (set at 30% of employee savings)	-£2.7m
Contingency at 10%	-£1.5m
Total	**-£16.6m**

These costs can either be met from the savings from reorganisation or offset against the future transformation savings. By year three there will be an annual net saving of £14.9 million rising to £33.2 million by year five.

Forming a single unitary authority by merging the county and district councils gives the greatest balance sheet stability.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5 and beyond	Total 5 year cost (-) / saving (+)
One-off transformation costs	-£6.6m	-£6.6m	-£1.7m	-£1.7m	•	**-£16.6m**
Transformation savings	•	•	£16.6m	£24.9m	£33.2m	**£74.7m**
Net cost (+) / saving (-)	**-£6.6m**	**-£6.6m**	**£14.9m**	**£23.2m**	**£33.2m**	**£58.1m**

Further opportunities for savings through wider public service reform, have not been taken into consideration at this stage. However, by driving place shaping prospects and expanding transformation efforts beyond local government to include our partners such as the NHS, Thames Valley Police, our voluntary and community sector, as well as national organisations such as Homes England, additional savings could be realised. The pre-transition period will be used to explore these opportunities together with our partners.

Only One Oxfordshire has the scale to manage any further financial volatility.

Fair Funding Review 2.0

The government has recently proposed changes to the distribution of funding for local government through the Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation. This includes proposed changes to the formulae behind the Settlement Funding Assessment for each council and adjusting for the level of resources available from council tax funding, as well as a reset of business rates funding. The proposal is to implement these changes from April 2026. The impact on individual councils and arrangements for phasing the impact, will not be known until the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27 is published in December 2025.

Oxfordshire councils have relatively high resources from the council tax base. As a result they are collectively expected to lose between £35 million and £55 million annually from implementation of the Fair Funding Review. In addition to the county council, four out of the five district councils in Oxfordshire are also expected to lose funding. Cherwell District Council will be particularly impacted as it has experienced strong growth in business rates.

The statutory invitation from government is clear that new councils must be large enough to withstand financial shocks. Oxfordshire has a duty to protect all of its places as part of local government reform.

While the assumption is that all councils will manage the funding reductions and set a balanced budget each year up to vesting day, only One Oxfordshire has the scale to manage any further financial volatility.

One Oxfordshire presents the firmest foundations to protect and enhance public services across the whole of Oxfordshire for current and future generations.

Rationalisation of assets

The estimated net book value of operational assets held by the existing councils in Oxfordshire is £2,137 million. There are also surplus assets valued at £19 million.

As ongoing service delivery must be maintained, the scope for rationalising operational assets is expected to focus largely on office buildings, depot facilities, and potentially fleet vehicles. There is also an opportunity to consolidate and rationalise other assets including the sharing of premises with health and other partners.

Rationalisation of assets will generate recurring revenue savings from reorganisation of £3.4 million and one-off capital receipts totalling £11.4 million, which could be used alongside the surplus assets of £18 million to help invest in growing the local economy. In the longer run, further capital receipts will be expected as a result of transformation.

Total borrowing and debt servicing costs

At vesting day, it is estimated that combining the balance sheets of the councils in Oxfordshire will result in Oxfordshire Council holding general long-term liabilities of £1,258 million plus £586 million relating to Housing Revenue Account liabilities and £528 million short-term liabilities. Fixed assets for the new council will be £4,232 million plus Housing Revenue Account assets of £1,339 million. The annual cost of financing the general fund debt from revenue is £56.5 million which is **6.2 per cent** of One Oxfordshire's estimated budget at vesting day.

The wider debt position and the impact of financing on budgets is clearly shown through the CIPFA Financial Resilience Index 2024, set out in the table below. This demonstrates that forming a single unitary authority by merging the county and district councils gives the greatest balance sheet stability, given the variation in assets and liabilities across the councils.

Key **L** Low risk **M** Medium risk **H** High risk

Indicators of financial stress	Oxfordshire County Council	Cherwell District Council	West Oxfordshire Council	South Oxfordshire Council	Vale of White Horse Council	Oxford City Council
Level of reserves	L	L	L	L	L	H
Change in reserves	L	H	M	M	L	H
External debt	L	H	L	n/a	n/a	H
Social care	L	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Income and funding	L	H	M	L	L	H

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 3. Financial resilience

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Like most councils with responsibility for SEND, Oxfordshire County Council has a deficit on the High Needs Block of its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). At the end of 2024/25 the cumulative deficit was £92 million. This is expected to increase to over £150 million by the end of 2025/26.

Since 2020/21 the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting has required councils with upper tier responsibilities to hold negative high needs DSG balances in an unusable reserve. The existing statutory override was due to end on 31 March 2026 but as part of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation, the government announced that this will be extended until 31 March 2028.

The anticipated white paper setting out details of SEND reform is now expected to be published in early 2026. The government is expected to set out further details on supporting local authorities as they transition to a reformed SEND system as part of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27.

Oxfordshire County Council has budgeted for an annual contribution to an earmarked reserve to ensure that overall, earmarked reserves will not be negative at the point at which the statutory override ends on 31 March 2028, and the deficit returns to the local authority balance sheet.

If the high needs deficit has not been addressed before vesting day, the accumulated deficit will return to the local authority balance sheet. In the event that the decision is to create more than one unitary council for Oxfordshire, this deficit will need to be apportioned to the new constituent councils based on the number of education, health and care plans.

Financial sustainability and economic growth opportunity

The payback period for a single unitary council in Oxfordshire will be approximately 1.3 years of reorganisation from vesting day. There will be a net saving from reorganisation of £3.2 million by 2028/29 and an ongoing benefit of £30.1 million from 2030/31, which will help to manage the potential impact of funding reform.

By achieving reorganisation savings from 2028/29, One Oxfordshire will have the financial headroom to be able to invest in, and deliver, its transformation programme, which will drive further savings from 2030/31 of £16.6 million with ongoing savings of £33.2 million by 2032/33.

The overall benefit, including reorganisation and transformation costs and savings, is summarised in the table on the next page.

The forecast savings mean that One Oxfordshire will be the most financially resilient council for Oxfordshire and more able to manage future demographic changes, funding risks and financial shocks.

One Oxfordshire can better grow the council tax base and business rates through strategic planning and investment. A unified council with strong finances, relatively low levels of debt, opportunities from the release of assets and associated capital receipts, all underpinned by strong economic growth, will be well-positioned to attract investors and drive Oxfordshire's future development.

Total savings of £162.6 million will be achieved by 2032/33.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 3. Financial resilience

	Year 0 2027/28	**Year 1** 2028/29	**Year 2** 2029/30	**Year 3** 2030/31	**Year 4** 2031/32	**Year 5** 2032/33 and beyond	**Total 5 year cost (-)/ saving (+)**
One-off transition costs	-£8.8m	-£8.8m	-£4.3m	•	•	•	**-£21.9m**
Reorganisation savings	•	£12.0m	£24.1m	£30.1m	£30.1m	£30.1m	**£126.4m**
Net cost (-) / saving (+) from aggregation	**-£8.8m**	**£3.2m**	**£19.8m**	**£30.1m**	**£30.1m**	**£30.1m**	**£104.5m**
One-off transformation costs	•	-£6.6m	-£6.6m	-£1.7m	-£1.7m	•	**-£16.6m**
Recurring transformation savings (base)	•	•	•	£16.6m	£24.9m	£33.2m	**£74.7m**
Net cost (-) / saving (+) from transformation	•	**-£6.6m**	**-£6.6m**	**£14.9m**	**£23.2m**	**£33.2m**	**£58.1m**
Overall net cost (-) / saving (+)	**-£8.8m**	**-£3.4m**	**£13.2m**	**£45.0m**	**£53.3m**	**£63.3m**	**£162.6m**

3.4 Council tax harmonisation

A consideration for the new council will be the level of council tax it requires and how this affects what residents will be required to pay in the future. Currently, council tax band D differs between Oxfordshire's five districts. As part of local government reform in Oxfordshire, the combined current council tax band Ds for district councils and Oxfordshire County Council will need to be harmonised to a single set of charges for the new unitary authority within seven years after vesting day.

Until rates are harmonised there will be a degree of difference in the increases to council tax between the old district council areas within the new unitary area. It will be for the new authority to decide which approach it takes to harmonise council tax; however, modelling has been undertaken to illustrate the options available. This indicates that applying the harmonisation of council tax based on the weighted average approach is the most beneficial approach financially.

Using this approach in year one will ensure total council tax is materially unchanged from the baseline. This produces a harmonised Oxfordshire Band D charge of £2,415.80. This would result in council tax variations between the old district council areas, ranging from £59 more in West Oxfordshire to £186 less in Oxford.

Most newly created unitary authorities have chosen to harmonise council tax over the shortest possible period on the weighted average council tax method to ensure the maximum council tax is available to fund services. Other options will need to be considered by the new council, but this will lead to a shortfall in income compared to the base position, which means that some of the savings that have been identified will need to be set aside to cover this.

3.5 Financial risks

The overall financial case and baseline needs to be considered in the context of the following ongoing key financial and other risks ahead of vesting day:

Achieving a balanced medium term financial strategy

It is assumed that prior to vesting day, each of the existing authorities will continue to set balanced budgets that are robust and deliverable.

It is also assumed that the existing authorities will continue to effectively manage their budgets and deliver planned savings.

A failure to do so will put at risk the assumptions and savings set out in the financial case.

Funding formula changes

Outcomes from the Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation are outstanding and will impact the funding available to local authorities from 2026/27 onwards. Analysis indicates that this could result in a significant reduction in funding within the county and this is likely to not only affect funding in the longer-term but could also impact on the ability to fund significant transition costs while facing additional pressure on core spending.

Management of demand for critical high-cost services

Action continues to be taken to manage demand for adult social care through the Oxfordshire Way, which aims to help people remain independent and well at home for longer.

However, demand for children's social care, sufficiency of places and cost of provision of care continue to be risks that could increase costs ahead of vesting day – although it is expected that any increase in costs will be addressed as part of the budget each year ahead of the formation of the new council.

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

There is a risk that if a solution to the accumulated SEND high needs deficit is not in place by 31 March 2028 when the statutory override ends, the debt transfers back to the balance sheet. This will have a significant impact on the overall level of earmarked reserves at the point a new authority is created.

Shared service arrangements

It has been assumed for the purposes of the financial case that current significant shared service arrangements will continue. This includes Oxfordshire County Council's arrangements with the Hampshire Shared Services Partnership (IBC) to deliver payroll, accounts payable, accounts receivable and other transactional finance services. If this is not the case, there will be additional costs associated with disaggregation.

Achievability of future savings

A very prudent approach to reorganisation and transformation savings has been included in the financial case given the risk of significant funding reductions from the implementation of the Fair Funding Review and a reset of the business rates baseline. Therefore, there is low risk of the full savings set out in this proposal not being achieved.

Oxford Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Oxford HRA Business Plan to 2031 is borderline affordable and does not provide sufficient financial capacity to respond to emerging pressures. Actions are being taken to reach a healthier baseline. However, there are still risks to long-term viability.

We have provided a strong case for One Oxfordshire, for one council with a countywide footprint that is financially resilient. However, it is people that make places. We need to build a council in partnership that listens to our communities, one that they can connect with and meets their needs. So we asked people what they thought of One Oxfordshire. When every voice matters, every place thrives.

High Street, Witney

4. One Oxfordshire engagement

4.1 Engaging on One Oxfordshire

One Oxfordshire is grounded in comprehensive engagement with both residents and stakeholders – shaped by their real, lived experiences; responding to their priorities; building on what they see as the benefits of one council and addressing their concerns.

We heard that local places matter, that people want clear and accountable decision making that is closer to communities; strong financial resilience; and simpler access to fairer, more responsive services that are cost effective and connected.

One Oxfordshire is designed to respond to these and strives to make local government in the county work better for everyone.

Delivering comprehensive engagement across Oxfordshire

Throughout the summer of 2025, we prioritised actively engaging and listening to residents, partners and businesses using a mix of approaches[46].

We ran a digital communications awareness raising campaign about local government reorganisation and One Oxfordshire; asked 1,344 residents what they thought in our countywide, statistically representative residents' survey; ran nine focus groups with adults; and four sounding boards with young people.

We also engaged partners in public services, Oxfordshire's 318 town and parish councils, the voluntary and community sector, and academia and businesses. We invited them to learn more about local government reorganisation and to share their views through targeted communications, town hall meetings, talking table events and meetings.

Our engagement programme was underpinned by robust research. This included qualitative research to inform the development of Oxfordshire County Council's strategic plan 2025 – 2028 and comprehensive stakeholder and resident research to inform the development of the 2023 Oxfordshire place narrative – highlighting the county's distinctiveness and unified identity as a leading centre for business, innovation and sustainable growth.

Legacy research such as a 2017 representative survey commissioned as part of a previous local government reorganisation bid found that 70 per cent of participating residents supported local government reorganisation and 70 per cent preferred a single council for Oxfordshire.

We heard from
1,203 people
through our commissioned countywide, statistically representative annual residents' survey.

We put residents centre stage reaching
284,128
people through our digital communications awareness raising campaign.

63
people participated across nine commissioned in-depth focus groups.

1,344
people took part in our open online survey.

81 young people
shared their views through four sounding board discussions held in secondary schools as part of our commitment to actively involving young people in shaping their future.

If you've got one council then there's not going to be the different opinions coming right, left and centre of what's more important and they can just focus on what they think needs focusing on.

(Focus group participant)

4.2 Key themes from our resident engagement

From our resident focused activity – our representative and open residents' surveys, focus groups and sounding boards – a number of common themes emerged.[46]

Clear decision making matters

Decision making was a dominant and consistent theme in our group discussions with residents and young people.

Clear and accountable decision making was rated top in both our residents' surveys as the most important attribute of any local authority created through local government reorganisation.

It achieved a mean score of 8.63 out of 10 in our statistically representative residents' survey.

One Oxfordshire opportunities:

We will simplify services for residents, businesses and investors and make them stronger with clear accountability. We will have one set of councillors, one chief executive and one senior management team. Elected councillors will operate at the heart of their communities within a new neighbourhood governance structure to support local decision making.

Local areas matter

Our annual representative residents' survey shows that 71 per cent of residents feel they belong strongly to their local area; 21 per cent feel this very strongly.

A dominant and consistent concern across all our resident engagement was that a single council for Oxfordshire would struggle to address specific local issues effectively, that their area would be overlooked as the council struggled to balance different needs, and there would be a loss of local knowledge and general disconnection from communities.

One Oxfordshire opportunities:

We will bring local government closer to communities, fostering civic participation and active involvement in shaping services. A new neighbourhood governance structure will ensure local issues are heard and acted on together with locally elected councillors who will represent their communities and places.

We can all be in unison across Oxfordshire.

(Young person in a sounding board discussion)

Local representation is important

Respondents to our surveys felt that partnering with town and parish councils to bring decision making closer to communities is a very important attribute of any local authority created through local government reorganisation.

This drew a mean score of 8.27 out of 10 in our statistically representative residents' survey.

Our discussions with town and parish councils sought to explore sector views on the devolution of services (with emphasis on local control, capacity and funding); community asset transfer; place shaping and neighbourhood governance; the importance of flexibility and tailored approaches for different councils; mechanisms for local influence and accountability; and the need for early, clear consultation and practical pilots.

One Oxfordshire's recognition of towns and parishes as central to local democracy was well received by local councils and seen as a meaningful step forward.

One Oxfordshire opportunities:

We will create strong neighbourhood governance and ensure the continuity of Oxford city's status and governance. We will bring decision making closer to communities through a stronger partnership with town and parish councils, a set of area committees, a communities unit and the development of modern charter trustees.

Residents value local government services

Our recent representative residents' survey demonstrates how highly residents' value local government services and how the work of councils impacts their quality of life daily.

A common concern from residents across our summer engagement activities was service disruption, including the potential for reduced services; services being cut or reorganised as part of local government reorganisation; and the importance of services not being disrupted through the transition to any new administration, especially if they are currently performing well.

Residents also identified that bringing areas under one Oxfordshire council could potentially positively impact on services. For example their consistency and equitability across the county in terms of service, planning and funding.

One Oxfordshire opportunities:

We will protect and improve critical services such as adult and children's social care, SEND and homelessness now and in the future. By bringing other services together under one roof we will also improve them, including waste and recycling; housing, planning and growth; community safety; and climate.

Generating savings and financial resilience are important

Survey respondents identified reducing duplication and running costs and generating savings from streamlining services as important factors of local government reorganisation. This resulted in mean scores of 8.30 out of 10 and 7.90 out 10 respectively in our statistically representative residents' survey.

Across our engagement mix, residents spontaneously recognised the potential of One Oxfordshire to offer strong financial resilience and greater cost efficiencies. Respondents to our statistically representative residents' survey gave this a mean score of 8.31 out of 10.

They described the potential for reduced duplication, head count and time wastage, improved coordination, and a more joined-up approach to governance; and were appreciative that this should result in greater cost efficiencies, ultimately creating more budget to fund key services.

One Oxfordshire opportunities:

We will provide the fastest, cheapest, lowest transition to a new council that is available in Oxfordshire – ready to transform on day one. Bringing services together under one council offers the best value for money for residents and will save **£63 million** per year with total net savings of **£163 million** by year five – ultimately benefitting every resident at a time when every penny counts.

"Merge duplicated departments to save money. Improved planning and execution with everything being in one house."

(Open survey respondent)

Minimising disruption to services is important

Minimising any disruption to services caused by separating them was rated the top most important area of focus of local government reorganisation in both our representative survey (mean score of 8.35 out of 10) and in our open survey.

One Oxfordshire opportunities:

The county council already delivers services on a countywide footprint, providing 85 per cent of local government services by expenditure in Oxfordshire. We will fully avoid disaggregation and the unnecessary fragmentation of critical services already performing well. We will protect and further improve these services – including adult and children's social care and SEND.

One Oxfordshire could deliver simpler access to services

Residents felt One Oxfordshire could deliver simpler access to services, that people would know who to contact better and would benefit from having one point of contact for services. This would streamline and simplify interactions for everyone.

Easy access for residents to council services was important to our survey respondents when considering how any further council should operate in Oxfordshire, with a mean score of 7.77 out of 10 in our representative residents' survey.

One Oxfordshire opportunities:

We will simplify services by having one front door for people to access all services and support – from social care, to housing, public health, community safety, waste, planning and everything in between. We will have one set of IT and customer contact systems and one portfolio of buildings, infrastructure and assets.

Much simpler to interact with one over-arching system, for things like school applications etc.

(Open survey respondent)

4.3 Key themes from our stakeholder engagement

A wide range of stakeholder engagement has taken place with a variety of individuals, groups and organisations to share and refine One Oxfordshire.

Local businesses: Local government reorganisation business engagement session, virtual town hall, written correspondence.

Local MPs: Joint meeting for all Oxfordshire MPs, one to one meetings and written correspondence.

Local councils: Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils talking tables session; meetings with individual town councils; a workshop for larger town councils and the Oxford parishes; and letters to neighbouring councils.

Voluntary and community services: Virtual question and answer session hosted by Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action with representatives from all three Oxfordshire proposals present, and one to one meetings.

Public sector providers: Meetings with Thames Valley Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner; written communication with integrated care boards and local hospitals; regular briefings with Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's chief fire officer and the county council's statutory directors for adult social care and children's services.

Education providers: Letters, joint briefings with heads and chairs of Oxfordshire and one to one meetings.

Oxfordshire county councillors: Three all councillor briefing sessions; two meetings of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee; one meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee; regular briefings of political group leaders and within political groups.

Employees: Sessions with our inclusion networks, managers forum, colleague forum and news updates using internal communication channels.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 4. One Oxfordshire engagement

Stakeholder feedback on One Oxfordshire

Stakeholders	Priorities	Concerns	One Oxfordshire opportunities
Businesses	▶ Simplicity of one council ▶ One vision for the whole of Oxfordshire ▶ Single planning authority	▶ Ensure no loss in democratic deficit	▶ We will create a new council size to reflect additional responsibilities of councillors ▶ We will create area committees to add greater democratic participation for residents and place councillors at the heart of their communities ▶ We will create a single, effective planning authority for all of Oxfordshire
Town and parish councils	▶ Simplicity of one council	▶ Needs to have a stronger local focus ▶ Need to be able to make contact and get issues resolved ▶ Don’t wish for assets and services to be ‘dumped on’ town and parish councils ▶ Recognise that there are distinct places and neighbourhoods within Oxford	▶ We will develop a town and parish framework building on the existing charter ▶ We will create area committees to add greater democratic participation for residents and place councillors at the heart of their communities ▶ One Oxfordshire will work with all those local councils who have the capacity and capability to do so

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 4. One Oxfordshire engagement

Stakeholders	Priorities	Concerns	One Oxfordshire opportunities
Education providers	▶ One vision for the whole of Oxfordshire	▶ Needs to protect the Oxford brand	▶ We will ensure that Oxford's city status is not lost ▶ We will agree modern charter trustees with the resources and influence to be a focal point for city issues ▶ We will consider a community governance review with Oxford stakeholders to explore robust and distinct governance arrangements for Oxford and its neighbourhoods, if needed ▶ We will continue to protect the Oxford brand locally, sub regionally and nationally, and ensure that a future mayoral strategic authority does that too
Employees	▶ Less disruption ▶ More opportunities for career development	▶ Too big ▶ Employees in people facing services work flexibly across the county to meet demand. If there's a split, there could be workforce challenges	▶ The county council already delivers services on a countywide footprint, providing 85 per cent of local government services by expenditure in Oxfordshire ▶ One Oxfordshire represents the quickest, lowest risk and lowest cost transition for local government reorganisation ▶ Oxfordshire County Council is already delivering services rated "good" and managing demand well
Trade unions	▶ Not applicable	▶ Not applicable	▶ We will maintain ongoing, transparent dialogue throughout the process

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 4. One Oxfordshire engagement

Stakeholders	Priorities	Concerns	One Oxfordshire opportunities
Councillors	▶ Simplicity of one council ▶ Geography makes sense	▶ Fewer councillors ▶ Needs to protect the Oxford brand ▶ Need to strengthen parish and town council relationship ▶ Council will be too big	▶ We will create a new council size to reflect additional responsibilities of councillors ▶ We will agree modern charter trustees with the resources and influence to be a focal point for city issues ▶ We will continue to protect the Oxford brand locally, sub regionally and nationally, and ensure that a future mayoral strategic authority does that too
Public sector providers	▶ Simplicity of one council ▶ Limited disruption ▶ Geography makes sense ▶ Maintains large pooled budget of £0.5 billion	▶ Too big ▶ Employees in people facing services work flexibly across the county to meet demand. If there's a split, there could be workforce challenges	▶ We will further strengthen and integrate our health and care services working with our NHS health and care partnership and NHS colleagues maximising our pooled budget arrangement ▶ We will work in partnership to create a prevention focused council
Voluntary and community (VCS) sector	▶ Limited disruption ▶ Cost effective council for the long-term more likely to create stable funding ▶ Clear geography ▶ Removes unnecessary competition with VCS in West Berkshire	▶ Needs to be a new council – ensuring the opportunity to reset is seized	▶ New council will have a new way of working, vision and culture ▶ The Oxfordshire Advisory Board will be established to guide transition – being a critical friend to a future council and ensuring commitments within the proposal are not just met but embedded

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 4. One Oxfordshire engagement

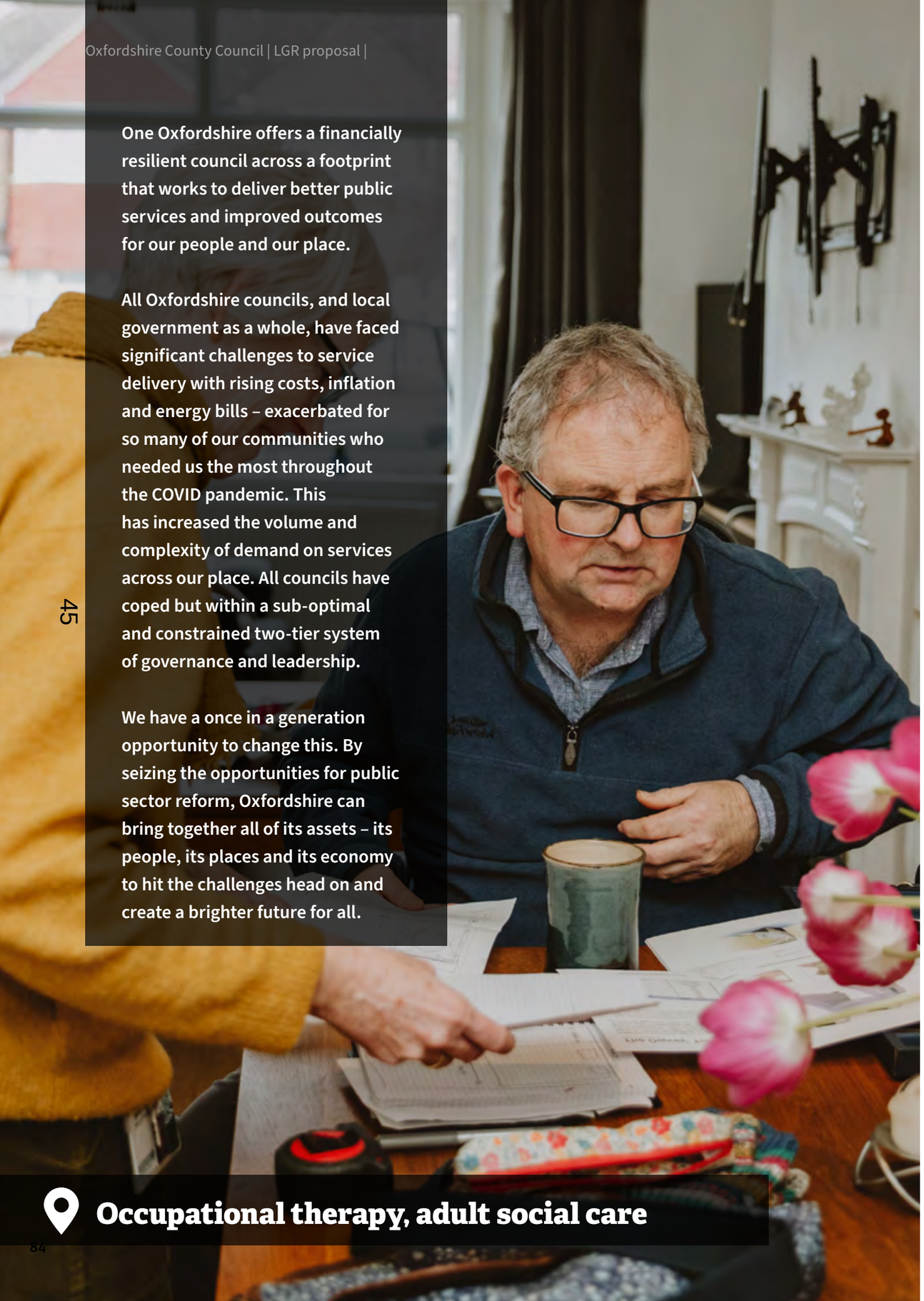
Stakeholders	Priorities	Concerns	One Oxfordshire opportunities
MPs	▶ Simplicity of one council ▶ Clear geography ▶ Strong financial model for new council	▶ Council will be too big ▶ Loss of focus on Oxford	▶ We will continue to protect the Oxford brand locally, sub regionally and nationally, and ensure that a future mayoral strategic authority does that too ▶ We will agree modern charter trustees with the resources and influence to be a focal point for city issues ▶ Area committees for Oxford and its neighbourhoods will be established

What we will deliver

As one council, we will set out how we will maintain and improve critical and wider public services by seizing the opportunities for public sector reform and the transformation that devolution will activate across our region.

One Oxfordshire will bring all of the county's assets together to not only meet the considerable local government challenges ahead but to significantly improve outcomes for our people, place and economy.

We will do this using the firm foundations of "good" critical service delivery already established.



One Oxfordshire offers a financially resilient council across a footprint that works to deliver better public services and improved outcomes for our people and our place.

All Oxfordshire councils, and local government as a whole, have faced significant challenges to service delivery with rising costs, inflation and energy bills – exacerbated for so many of our communities who needed us the most throughout the COVID pandemic. This has increased the volume and complexity of demand on services across our place. All councils have coped but within a sub-optimal and constrained two-tier system of governance and leadership.

We have a once in a generation opportunity to change this. By seizing the opportunities for public sector reform, Oxfordshire can bring together all of its assets – its people, its places and its economy to hit the challenges head on and create a brighter future for all.

Occupational therapy, adult social care

5. Improved outcomes for people and place

5.1 Our people

For decades, public service policy in the UK has been attempting to 'get upstream', intervene positively and early, and give our people and our communities the tools necessary to create independent, resilient and fulfilling lives. This is never easy, but One Oxfordshire will finally enable us to do this and prove what is possible. The evidence is compelling – bringing all services and all resources together within one council is the only way to reduce the costs of high demand services and sustain improved outcomes for our residents and stakeholders over the medium to long-term.

Building a prevention council

Preventing ill health, homelessness and worklessness are complicated public policy challenges, but they present a combined threat to population health and wellbeing across the country, and Oxfordshire is not without its challenges. Transforming life chances in childhood and young adulthood is critical.

Through the continuation of critical service delivery alongside reform to integrate currently fragmented services across district councils, the alignment of the whole public service system (NHS, Department for Work and Pensions, and Thames Valley Police) with One Oxfordshire enables us to work upstream tackling the causes of ill health earlier or design them out completely. It will enable a much more comprehensive and effective approach to prevention, including addressing the drivers of demand. This will help improve outcomes for residents, including vulnerable children and adults.

The implementation of the NHS 10 Year Plan presents a significant opportunity to strengthen the integration of place-based wellbeing offers with NHS health services at neighbourhood level across Oxfordshire. By aligning our collective efforts, we can ensure that the health and social care needs of our diverse communities are addressed in a cohesive, targeted and sustainable manner.

Oxfordshire Council will be responsible for social care, public health, housing, homelessness, planning and leisure services, enabling a truly integrated approach to population wellbeing. By focusing on prevention, One Oxfordshire can effectively coordinate efforts across all sectors, ensuring that our businesses and, most importantly, communities fulfil their potential.

One Oxfordshire will:

- Invest long-term and at scale in community assets and initiatives such as family hubs that tackle the wider determinants of health, reduce inequalities and tackle child and family poverty head on.
- Bring together wider public health services such as leisure facilities, benefit support and environmental health to make it easier for people to get help early.
- Create more inclusive, child and dementia-friendly public spaces.
- Be financially resilient to plan and deliver services for the long-term – crucial for a prevention and early intervention approach. We will invest, including using our Housing Revenue Account, at scale in good quality housing and skills programmes that support sustainable inclusive growth.
- Deliver a single partnership strategy with the voluntary and community sector to ensure that hyper-local expertise is harnessed, not lost in a larger structure. We will ensure that services are delivered closer to communities and support the vital role these groups play in building social connection and identifying risks early.
- Adopt a population health management approach with our NHS partners, underpinned by the robust use of shared data and research partnerships that will identify inequalities, unmet needs and their root causes. This will enable early tailored interventions to take place. Linking multiple, currently disparate, services together builds a stronger evidence base and connections into communities to help prevent issues escalating.
- Maximise our pooled budgets with the NHS - enabling more strategic and effective use of resources, reducing duplication and ensuring decisions are made jointly with our partners.
- Harness the value of multi-disciplinary teams working side by side with partner organisations, in co-located buildings to deliver services locally that design out poor health outcomes or intervene early.
- Design and deliver services that are better coordinated and more responsive to residents' needs. This will improve outcomes, support earlier intervention and encourage preventative care, enabling people to live independently for longer using limited resources more effectively.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

A neighbourhood NHS health and care partnership

Neighbourhood working is not new and it is a central part of One Oxfordshire's plans to build on our firm foundations to further integrate with the Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (ICB) and its existing health and care partnership.

Health and care partnerships (HCPs) bring leaders together to join up services, accelerating this integration, and find new ways to use resources collectively to offer better value and more targeted care.

HCPs focus on prevention and reducing inequalities. They make choices and prioritise actions and interventions to deliver three shifts of change, moving care from treatment to prevention; acute to community; and analogue to digital.

One Oxfordshire will streamline governance across Oxfordshire to drive better outcomes in health and care for our people. We will leverage the pooled budget of £0.5 billion to do this as well as use the 18 integrated commissioning posts the county council and Thames Valley ICB already share. This pooled budget is the largest of any system outside of mayoral strategic authorities in England.

One Oxfordshire, together with the HCP, will ensure we will have a single conversation that meets the needs of all Oxfordshire and provides critical enablers to deliver stronger, simpler services, particularly those in clear need of greater equity such as homelessness.

These enablers include using the significant financial headroom we have to invest for the long-term, co-locating clinical, population and community health teams from a single public estate and using our shared data and insight. Put together, this will create sustainable services that support the management of long-term health conditions across the county reducing demand on acute services.

"There is an urgent need to transform the health and care system. We need to move to a neighbourhood health service that will deliver more care at home or closer to home, improve people's access, experience and outcomes, and ensure the sustainability of health and social care delivery[47]."

Oxfordshire Way

Oxfordshire has one of the lowest costs of adult social care provision across the country. Not only are we low cost, but we deliver great outcomes as our results from working in the Oxfordshire Way demonstrate.

Oxfordshire County Council developed Oxfordshire Way, an approach that supports people to live well and independently within their communities for as long as possible. Working in partnership with health and care organisations and our voluntary and community sector, we have delivered tangible and significant results.

These outcomes are not coincidental; they are the direct result of operating at scale across the county.

The model relies on the ability to plan, invest in, and manage preventative services – such as the countywide Live Well Oxfordshire Community Links services – at a scale that makes them viable and impactful.

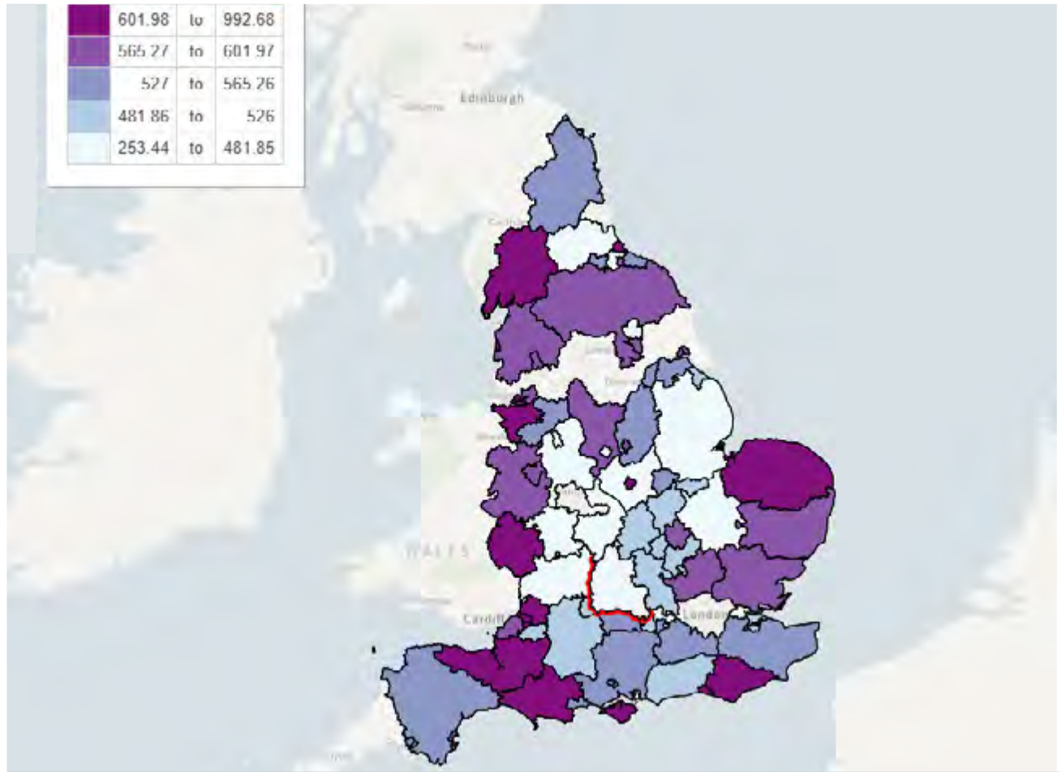
Since the implementation of our approach to adult social care we have achieved a **67 per cent reduction in the number of people waiting for a social care assessment since April 2021**.

Furthermore, by focusing on prevention and independence, the growth in the number of people requiring long-term care has been cut by 20 per cent against demographic projections, meaning 150 more people are living independently in their own communities than would otherwise be expected.

Not only are we delivering high levels of quality care, we are doing this as one of the most cost effective upper tier councils in England.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

Counties and unitaries adult care spend 2024 - 25[48]



Oxfordshire Result	Oxfordshire result	England average (2022/23)	Performance vs national
Overall satisfaction of people who use services	68.5%	64.4%	Better
Permanent care home admissions (65+) per 100,000	337.8	560.8	Better
Older people still at home 91 days after discharge	86.3%	82.3%	Better
People who use services who feel safe	74.6%	69.7%	Better
Adult social care providers rated good/outstanding	90.3%	83.2%	Better

Well Together

The Well Together programme aims to address the wider determinants of health by tackling health and social inequalities at their roots.

It is delivered in partnership by Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action and Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) and is funded by the NHS.

To support this programme Oxfordshire County Council **allocated £1 million to CFO to work with the ten most deprived communities in Oxfordshire**.

We were able to convene a single, unified conversation with the majority of voluntary sector groups, allowing us to co-produce preventative interventions tailored to tackle the underlying drivers of health inequalities.

This work has had a significant impact, reaching nearly 12,000 vulnerable people in a short space of time[49].

It has helped those from our most deprived communities become physically active. It has significantly reduced the need for our statutory health services as a result of people becoming more active and has improved their health and wellbeing.

This achievement was recently recognised nationally, with Oxfordshire being shortlisted at the Health Service Journal national awards as exemplars for achieving substantial positive impact through partnership working. Oxfordshire County Council is planning to scale up these efforts across the county to maximise impact.

Health Inequality Forum

Community health development officers work locally to co-produce solutions and strengthen engagement by linking statutory services, voluntary organisations and community groups together.

This work is coordinated through a countywide Health Inequality Forum, supported by joint funding from multiple partners, including health services. Oxfordshire's scale for efficiency is used while retaining flexibility for local needs.

There are plans to roll this successful, partnership-driven approach out across the county's communities.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

Protecting our critical services

Our work with Newton Europe has demonstrated that we are able to contain our future people based demand[50] through One Oxfordshire with a continued focus on early help, prevention and transformation.

Our critical services (or defined in the statutory invitation as crucial services) are highly complex and subject to high demand, and will be both protected and improved with One Oxfordshire.

There are critical services that follow children and adults across their life and form a significant portion of expenditure for Oxfordshire County Council.

We will continue to deliver these services without disaggregation. These are:

- **Children's social care:** safeguarding, corporate parenting for care experienced children and care leavers, early help, family support, youth offending services and the responsibility for the regional adoption agency.
- **Education:** school place planning, school improvement, admissions and legal attendance, home to school transport and access to high quality early years provision.
- **Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND):** health, education and care for children and young people with additional needs.
- **Adult social care:** support for older people, people with physical disabilities and neurodiverse people, and those with mental health needs.
- **Homelessness:** statutory service for those who need accommodation.

Adult and children's social care

Oxfordshire County Council delivers "good" adult and children's services (as recognised by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission). The greatest risk to these services will be fragmentation through unnecessary and / or excessive disaggregation, which will adversely impact outcomes and performance. Demand and the resources to address this have been built up countywide and are not evenly distributed.

That risk has been raised nationally by the Association of Directors of Children's Services in a letter to the minister on 23 June 2025. This letter made clear that the extent of risk to quality care for vulnerable children is not just a consequence of disaggregation, but of the degree of disaggregation below the principle of population thresholds of 500,000 set out in the government's white paper.

Similar points were echoed in the Association of Directors of Adults' Services letter to the minister dated 14 August 2025. Specifically, the "need to ensure diverse communities with a mixture of health, wealth and age profiles are needed to avoid creating highly concentrated units of need – this will help to ensure that any new councils have a good basis on which they can balance demand for services with the ability of local populations to help pay for them".

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Our SEND improvement journey has been a key strategic priority for Oxfordshire's Local Area Partnership and for the county council since 2023 following an inspection of services. We have worked closely with our integrated care board, local health providers, schools and settings, and our parent carer forum to develop services and improve outcomes for children and young people and in line with the regulatory framework.

We are proud of the progress we have made to improve the timeliness and quality of support for children. The county council has improved the quality and timeliness of education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and needs assessments, operating above national statutory deadlines. Our stock-take and deep-dive evaluations from the Department for Education have evidenced strong and sustained improvement across all key indicators for children and young people with SEND.

This improvement work will continue – particularly with the anticipated SEND white paper and our high needs deficit management plan. Splitting services risks destabilising this important progress.

Homelessness

As housing costs rise across England and in Oxfordshire, more families are facing housing challenges and homelessness. Rents in Oxfordshire's private market have continued to climb[51] and temporary accommodation use is also rising quickly, straining council budgets and negatively impacting households and children across Oxfordshire. Authorities in Oxfordshire owed nearly 3,000 prevention and relief duties in the last year, indicating the scale of the challenge in the area.

Oxfordshire County Council is already delivering homelessness services for vulnerable post 18 year olds – a more consistent and joined-up approach is already proving itself across Oxfordshire. Expanding this approach under One Oxfordshire will unlock the greatest benefits to all those experiencing homelessness.

The priority for One Oxfordshire will be for a safe, legal and confident transition of employees and records to ensure a seamless continuity of services for vulnerable people who use them and focus relentlessly on reducing homelessness.

Improving critical services

One Oxfordshire will:

- Create a single housing authority with the ability to leverage a housing revenue account (HRA) across the county, providing great housing solutions at scale – removing all costs associated with coordinating and leading work across five district councils.
- Speed up decision making using single systems and streamlining engagement with partners such as the NHS, the Department for Work and Pensions and Thames Valley Police.
- Build a single front door for homelessness services – one website for people to access help and support; and one way of working to make the best use of resources.
- Work together with the Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (ICB) to create one joined-up way of planning and funding health and wellbeing services. With a single council, we can look at the bigger picture and see how things like temporary accommodation for homeless people affects other costs, such as health services and transport for children with special educational needs.
- Review the whole Oxfordshire one public sector estate (land and buildings). This will help make sure communities have what they need for the future. Where possible, we'll free up sites so they can be used for temporary accommodation, affordable housing, parks and leisure, and commercial space.
- Strengthen its confident and experienced workforce delivering "good" highly complex critical services in high demand across Oxfordshire that can flex to the needs of communities within a new unitary, at scale and at pace.
- Align benefit services to strategic priorities, such as early help and prevention, to support earlier identification of families who may be falling into financial difficulty.
- Control funding levers across all housing-related funds (Better Care Fund, Disabled Facilities Grants etc), from discretionary housing payments to funding for supported housing to enable smarter, long-term investments that benefit the whole public sector in Oxfordshire.
- Create one team focused on preventing homelessness early, before people reach a crisis point. By combining several housing teams into one, Oxfordshire can have more employees available to help with, for example, mediation for families with 16 - 17 year olds; working with landlords; and resolving benefit problems for people at risk of losing their homes.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

- Guarantee everyone, regardless of where they live, has access to the same services creating fairer service delivery. We will make sure the rules for who can get help are the same everywhere in Oxfordshire so people at risk don't miss out on support when they need it most.
- Use our strategic partnership with Homes England to invest in infrastructure and unlock and accelerate housing delivery. As a strategic sized authority, we will be in the best position to attract and use more funding for homes working through existing and new wholly owned companies and joint ventures. We will leverage the Housing Revenue Account, grant from the Social and Affordable Homes Programme, Section 106 contributions, prudential borrowing and private sector investment.

The out of hospital team

The out of hospital team is made up of social workers, housing officers and clinical staff. Its focus is supporting hospital discharge for people who cannot be sent home due to a housing related issue. Although this group of people is far smaller than those in hospital waiting for a social care package, their discharge can be delayed for far longer.

The multi-disciplinary team works across systems to achieve solutions, which includes helping Oxfordshire achieve one of the lowest delays in the region.

In 2017, Oxfordshire was among the worst performing local authority areas in the country for hospital discharges. However, **Oxfordshire is now in the top quartile for discharge performance nationally (2025).** This is an example of how multi-disciplinary working can solve problems that cut across different systems and organisations.

The team improves outcomes for people experiencing homelessness by providing coordinated person-centred care that addresses health, housing and social needs as a whole. It also helps people access services, maintain continuity across them and builds up trust between agencies and vulnerable people.

5.2 Our place

To invest in people, and improve outcomes, we also need to invest in places – the dividends are shared success.

Since the influential Lyons Inquiry[52], the responsibility for place shaping and place making has been felt keenly by local government across the country.

Creating the conditions for a place to flourish, to amplify its assets confidently on a regional, national and international stage is not desirable, it is essential.

The delivery of a high performing, inclusive and balanced economy in Oxfordshire is not just pivotal for output and productivity, it is the most effective way of improving the social determinants of ill-health, reducing inequalities and childhood poverty levels across the county.

The stakes could not be higher. The key is to connect these unrivalled growth opportunities that One Oxfordshire brings to all of our people, across all of our places.

Anything less than this continues the unproductive and unequal patterns and adverse impacts of the past.

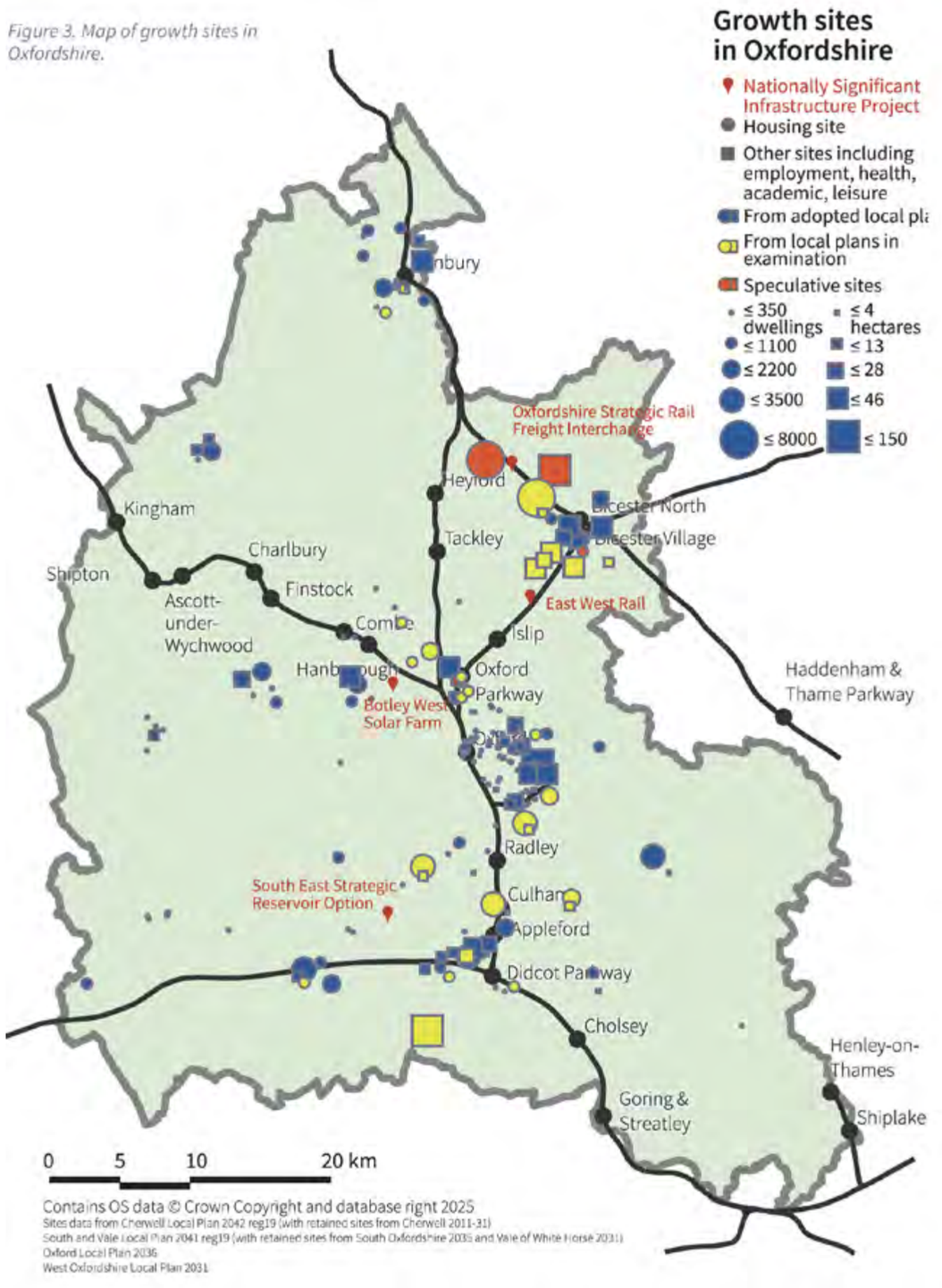
"Sustained economic growth is central to this government's Plan for Change and is the only way to increase the prosperity of our country and improve the living standards of working people[53]."

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

Making planning work for our county and country

Growth sites in Oxfordshire[54]

Figure 3. Map of growth sites in Oxfordshire.



As well as delivering high quality public services we need to plan effectively for the future. Oxfordshire will play a significant role in delivering the government's Industrial Strategy with strong capabilities across six of the government's eight growth-driving sectors: digital technologies, life sciences, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, defence, and creative industries.

Great opportunity to deliver exists – for example, the first AI Growth Zone in the UK is at Culham Campus in Abingdon, part of the Science Vale area, which is an internationally recognised concentration of these industries.

Nearby Harwell brings together academia, hosting teams from over 30 UK universities, national science assets and industry to drive scientific and technological breakthroughs. But progress has been slow in other areas. One Oxfordshire will accelerate this progress.

Strategic planning and infrastructure

In 2021, all councils agreed the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision – the precursor to the Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (Oxfordshire Plan 2050). The production of this plan was linked to government funding for the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal in 2018 – for supporting infrastructure and affordable housing, and to accelerate delivery of 100,000 new homes in the county.

The plan failed in 2022 on the issue of agreeing housing numbers. It has impeded the ability to take a strategic approach, such as being able to focus on development around transport corridors. The failure demonstrates that scale is essential when making decisions about growth.

The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) identifies and prioritises the infrastructure needed to support sustainable development; the current barriers to delivery and gaps in future infrastructure provision; as well funding opportunities up to 2050.

By assessing all infrastructure needs from energy to transport, the strategy outlines the overarching approach needed to facilitate sustainable, inclusive growth for Oxfordshire.

One Oxfordshire is designed so we can still represent our communities but are capable of making strong plan-led decisions at scale. We will, with a mayoral strategic authority (MSA), coordinate and unlock infrastructure investment and economic growth opportunities to meet the Oxfordshire's needs, including housing and transport, while protecting our environment and ensuring access to green spaces for all our communities.

Supporting growth and improving vital transport connectivity requires a council to provide and deliver new and improved infrastructure.

Due to the risks and challenges with construction, including market inflation volatility, One Oxfordshire is of a scale that is capable of managing cost and programme variances and absorb financial pressures if and when required.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

As the county grows, the need for cohesive transport solutions has never been greater to shape how people, goods and services flow across our county. Transport planning must consider a broad geography, ensuring that strategic transport interchanges - bus, coach, rail, and even digital platforms - are inclusive and accessible.

One Oxfordshire, with an MSA, can ensure strategic transport planning and delivery takes place across the whole of the county. We will provide a single, clear view on the mobility needs for Oxfordshire, and the capacity and capability to manage our connected network in a seamless fashion.

Integrated transport is not simply a matter of convenience; it's key for Oxfordshire's economic success, environmental stewardship and social inclusion – unlocking opportunity while future-proofing the county against the challenges of growth, climate change and evolving patterns of movement.

OxRail 2040

The county council's ambitious OxRAIL 2040 strategy will support sustainable growth in emerging areas such as Begbroke, Culham, and Wantage and Grove. It will radically improve connectivity between high productivity sites and the wider region via the Cowley Branch Line.

Leveraging rail infrastructure in this way enables coordinated, transit-oriented growth that supports climate resilience and revitalises communities. Plans for enhanced stations and new ones (at Ardley, Bagbroke, Oxford Cowley and Littlemore, and Wantage and Grove) also create opportunities for sustainable growth around these locations and a wider, more connected Oxfordshire. Electrification will deliver more sustainable, higher capacity services and enable our Oxfordshire Metro idea for joined up connections between rail, bus, active travel and new rapid mass transit options. This includes for the Oxford - Witney - Carterton corridor.

The county council is proposing to invest up to £7.5 million into the Cowley Branch Line, in addition to future investment in connectivity to the two new stations. Alongside the contribution of other partners, this commitment will unlock this £120 million scheme that will expedite the delivery of 6 - 10,000 homes and support the creation of up to 10,000 new jobs.

This will connect both Oxfordshire's highest performing science and innovation sites and provide a vital new transport link for our most deprived communities. It demonstrates the ability and benefits that an authority that operates at scale can offer.

Local plan making

Oxfordshire has a history of struggling to co-operate on planning across boundaries. In the current planning round, Oxford City Council has had its local plan rejected at examination stage for failing to meet the duty to cooperate. The planning inspectorate has also written to Vale of White Horse District Council and South Oxfordshire District Council recommending that their joint plan is withdrawn, again on the issue of the duty to cooperate.

As a result of slow planning and delivery, with no strategic approach, Oxfordshire and the UK is missing economic growth opportunities. Development will also come forward that is less productive and sustainable.

The challenges around plan making will likely continue with any combination of multiple unitary authorities in the county – scale is necessary for decision making in this space.

We need a fresh start for plan making – we can only do that with One Oxfordshire. It is imperative that sufficient scale is achieved in this round of local government reorganisation as history tells us it could take multiple generations to change it again.

Housing

A priority for strategic and local planning is housing. Oxfordshire has the potential to meet countywide housing needs by delivering homes near key employment sites and in connected locations - reducing travel demand and supporting vibrant, well-connected communities. The majority of journeys are internal to Oxfordshire, which emphasises Oxfordshire as a connected ecosystem – where people work and live in different parts of the county. It is critical that transport is planned on a wider geography to effectively maximise public transport, cycling, wheeling and walking opportunities.

Successful strategic planning for long-term economic and housing growth in the county will only be possible with One Oxfordshire.

The projected growth scenarios are between approximately **123,000** and **134,000** additional homes across Oxfordshire between 2024/25 and 2049/50[55].

The housing growth figures for Oxfordshire districts detailed on the next page represent an annual target of **5,300 homes per year for five years** as determined by the National Planning Policy Framework. This is a level significantly above the existing annual requirements of adopted local plans and current delivery rates and very significantly above the previous standard method planning assumptions.

The average annual delivery of homes across Oxfordshire ranges from 3,638 homes per annum (over a 15 year period) to 4,759 homes annually (based on the latest three year average delivery rate)[55]. Housing delivery peaked in 2018/19, 2019/20, and 2022/23, when more than 5,000 homes were delivered per year.

Analysis of recent delivery trends demonstrates a significant increase in housing delivery since 2016/17, with the three year average being 30 per cent higher than the 15 year average. Locally, the highest levels of housing completions have been achieved in the Vale of White Horse, followed closely by Cherwell and South Oxfordshire. Housing delivery has reduced considerably across the county in the last two monitoring years[55].

The identification of Heyford Park as a flagship new town by government is recognition of the county's potential to be a contributor to net housing growth above local housing targets. The ability to look strategically at Oxfordshire and develop a new town in a sustainable, connected area that can serve the needs of the city and county as a whole, is a strong model to follow – but infrastructure must come first.

One Oxfordshire offers a transformative solution. We can fully leverage the county's strengths in high-growth sectors such as AI and life sciences, while delivering well connected communities supported by seamless transport networks.

One Oxfordshire will enable the county to respond effectively to national infrastructure priorities, unlock stalled sites and deliver regeneration at scale. Delivery of sufficient and sustainable development is critical to the delivery of our economic success; without this, we are continuing to constrain the innovation and entrepreneurial advantages we have across the county for the benefit of UK PLC.

Area	Annual requirement of adopted local plan expressed as a yearly average	Three year average delivery	2023-24 delivery	Previous annual housing standard method (pre Dec 2024)	Housing standard method (as at Dec 2024)
Cherwell	1,362	1,104	805	706	1,118
Oxford	544	500	365	762	1,087
South Oxfordshire	981	1,104	978	579	1,242
Vale of White Horse	1,138	1,246	1,168	633	949
West Oxfordshire	797	805	683	594	905
Total	**4,822**	**4,759**	**3,999**	**3,229**	**5,301**

One Oxfordshire will:

- Develop a single local plan for Oxfordshire adopted on accelerated timescales by the end of 2028/29. This will be with the support of government giving us the tools such as continuing authority status; meeting existing reorganisation timescales; prioritisation with the planning inspectorate; and committing to mayoral elections in 2027 to ensure alignment with the development of a spatial development strategy.
- Act as a single point of contact to work with the mayor and the mayoral strategic authority to develop a spatial development strategy, which brings single strategies that cover housing, growth, infrastructure and transport together.
- Form a single local planning authority – streamlining decision-making, resources, plans and governance through planning committees for the whole county. This will support faster, more coordinated progress towards housing and development delivery, ensuring coordination of infrastructure and a connected and authentic approach to community involvement using area committees.
- Use the Ox Place[56] model of social and affordable housing delivery to its full potential – shaping a whole Oxfordshire approach, demonstrating the strengths of municipal housebuilding and active management of the local affordable and social rent housing market.
- Create one local authority landowner for the county – able to take a strategic review of all land and land types with a clear focus on housing.
- Create a single integrated digital operational system for plan making, engagement, development management and enforcement. This will deliver significant economies of scale but also a more customer friendly interface.
- Use its collective scale and standing to drive through strategic housing schemes, unblock stalled developments, champion inclusive growth that supports health, education and employment outcomes and ensure all communities benefit from future nationally significant infrastructure projects.
- Provide a single front door for investors and developers, with a standardised policy and approach across developments.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

Oxfordshire Developers Forum

The Oxfordshire Developers Forum is organised and facilitated by Oxfordshire County Council and includes developers, landowners, investors, advisors and other stakeholders across the county, alongside all Oxfordshire councils.

The forum provides open and constructive dialogue between all Oxfordshire councils, property owners and developers to facilitate more joined-up growth and development delivery in Oxfordshire.

It provides a strategic platform for dialogue on growth, housing and development across the county, to address common issues such as utilities and infrastructure, to share best practice and to champion a long-term, place led approach to development.

OX Place

In 2016, Oxford City Council established OX Place[56] as its own housing company to create high quality, genuinely affordable homes in the city. It builds homes that local people need and profits are invested back into the city for essential services, and into building more homes for people who need them.

OX Place offers homes to buy outright and shared ownership, which gives people the chance to get onto the property ladder by buying a share of a home and renting the rest.

OX Place also builds council owned rented homes for those who need a safe, high quality, affordable rental home in the city. In some cases, these are for people who can't afford to buy, in others, providing affordable homes for key workers – nurses, doctors, university researchers and local school teachers who may need to live in the city while they're training, but then move away.

Delivering connected public services across Oxfordshire

Making planning work for our county and country will enable us to strategically plan and deliver high quality connected public services.

The move to Oxfordshire Council and how we design and deliver the full breadth of public services for our people will accelerate the effective and ongoing shaping of our place for a really bright future for everyone.

Given the county council already delivers services on a countywide footprint, providing 85 per cent of local government services by expenditure in Oxfordshire – including adult and children's social care, some education services, public health, fire and rescue, libraries and museums, roads and transport, trading standards, waste disposal and recycling – there is a strong case to maintain stability and avoid disaggregation of services.

One Oxfordshire is the only proposal that removes this risk, allowing service delivery that really changes people's lives to be prioritised and further improvements to be made. We will be able to retain the strengths of these services and build from the firm foundations they provide, deepening integration and operating at scale.

Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

A key service area strongly affected by both local government reform and devolution is fire and rescue. In the Thames Valley, three fire and rescue authorities operate:

1. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority (combined fire authority)
2. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (combined fire authority)
3. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (county council).

Those in the traditional Thames Valley footprint operate independently but have a strong programme of public sector innovation, which includes the handling of 999 calls, mobilising of fire engines, procurement, fire investigation and operational response. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service delivers effective operations throughout the county, now geographically aligned with the neighbourhood police area for Oxfordshire.

If local government reorganisation results in multiple councils in Oxfordshire, a combined fire authority will need to be established to govern fire and rescue. This would be a temporary structure until a mayoral strategic authority and the mayor is in place to discharge those functions. This will create avoidable cost, including resource to implement this change, and possible risk to service delivery.

One Oxfordshire will:

- Retain Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue service offering a straightforward transition to a future Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Service – avoiding unnecessary structural change, ensuring operational consistency prior to devolution arrangements being put in place.
- Work seamlessly and in a unified fashion with our police and NHS partners to identify houses at risk of fire, delivering preventative interventions.
- Provide continued alignment of local government with police, fire and health – vital for the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum, local and regional partners – and central government to enable the most efficient response to emergencies.

Public and community safety

Thriving high streets and vibrant market towns are not just about economic growth, they are also drivers of how safe and satisfied residents feel about their local area.

These assets foster a pride of place – recognised in the government's draft Local Government Outcome Framework and its Pride of Place Strategy.

Community safety in Oxfordshire is coordinated at a county level by the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership with district-led community safety partnerships providing a local coordination role.

For people to have confidence in their public services, we also need to be prepared for emergencies. The UK Government Resilience Framework calls for a whole of society approach to resilience, emphasising:

- Clear leadership and accountability across local and national levels.
- Integrated risk management, especially for emergency situations.
- Efficient coordination across agencies and sectors.

The county council is a category 1 responder for emergencies. Our joint Oxfordshire resilience team delivers a number of statutory duties across the county to plan, train, and run exercises for emergency response, business continuity and community resilience. We work in partnership with multiple agencies both in Oxfordshire and regionally, as part of the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum, on emergency preparedness and response. We are experienced at operating locally and providing mutual aid at scale.

The same holds true for the longer-term emergency of climate change. According to the Climate Emergency UK's (CEUK) 2025 Scorecard, Oxfordshire County Council is the best county council in England on climate action[57]. We play a leadership role on a national and regional stage and actively share the innovative work that Oxfordshire is doing with other councils.

We have developed a climate vulnerability assessment[58], which maps the current and future risks posed by climate related hazards linked to infrastructure; health, communities and the build environment; the natural environment and assets; and business and industry at a local level across the county.

This is a powerful tool to enable a whole of society approach to resilience. It allows local communities to identify priority actions and also gives a strategic overview of the ever-increasing risks of overheating and flooding to our vulnerable residents, providing the baseline to build preventative work on.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

One Oxfordshire will:

- Consolidate countywide and district led community safety partnerships and align regulatory services for environmental health, building control and trading standards, delivering more efficient resources to coordinate consistent action together with area committees.
- Use local data and intelligence to detect emerging issues in communities to predict and prevent criminal activity, coordinated and shared with multiple agencies.
- Work collaboratively with area committees to ensure all our communities – urban and rural – understand flood risk and support them to prepare and protect those impacted most.
- Build community resilience to climate impacts by linking services such as development, planning and housing within a single authority.
- Drive a unified emergency planning response across Oxfordshire, reducing duplication and gaps in coverage, providing national assurance.

Trading standards tackling illegal tobacco and vapes

Criminality on our high streets is undermining our neighbourhoods and acting as a symbol of national decline. This concern prompted Oxfordshire County Council to undertake targeted work to tackle illegal tobacco and vapes. The sale of such products, sold at 'pocket-money prices', drives health inequality, by keeping people smoking and smoking more, helps recruit the next generation of smokers, brings organised crime into our communities and undermines legitimate businesses.

Since 2019, our trading standards team has seized nearly 800,000 illegal cigarettes, 189 kilos of illegal rolling and shisha tobacco, and over 13,000 illegal vapes. This has led to dozens of successful prosecutions, with one recent defendant being ordered to pay £400,000.

More recently, our officers are regularly seizing illegal nicotine pouches at the same locations as those selling illegal tobacco and vapes – often hidden in sophisticated 'hides' within the premises.

Leisure, culture and heritage

The pandemic showed us how much the public value open spaces and how the limitations placed on people's freedom was a source of huge strain for many of our communities. From parks and open recreation spaces right through to culture, leisure and libraries, these services are essential to building and maintaining a sense of place. They enhance social capital and experiential learning especially for young people, and promote better health, wellbeing and community cohesion.

Council of Sanctuary

In March 2025, we became the first county council to be accredited with Council of Sanctuary status following independent assessment.

Being a Council of Sanctuary means working in partnership through the Oxfordshire Migration Partnership to ensure a warm welcome for all new arrivals, embracing integration and supporting independent living for those staying in the county.

To drive strong community cohesion, we have created inclusive opportunities to promote cultural celebration events through our libraries and the Oxfordshire Museum.

We are also part of the Warm Welcome Network, which brings communities together to share stories, while also providing shared warm spaces and drinks across the winter.

These kinds of activities encourage social mixing and help to connect people with different cultures and beliefs. This is essential for dispelling myths, creating an inclusive society and developing a more consistent approach to supporting all of our communities.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 5. Improved outcomes for people and place

One Oxfordshire will:

- Join up, streamline and integrate leisure, culture and heritage services with public health, adult and children's social care and SEND, enabling better coordination and more efficient delivery.
- Reduce inequalities of service provision across the county, particularly for leisure, and create inclusive spaces and service access for all, reducing any stigmas for protected and vulnerable groups of people.
- Invest at scale and for the long-term in libraries, museums and cultural venues as vital community assets ensuring fair access to all across Oxfordshire.
- Promote festivals, arts, and heritage initiatives countywide to drive a culture of localism and support community cohesion.
- Empower area committees to have oversight of services including leisure, culture and parks, allowing decisions to reflect community priorities.
- Connect and complement our heritage and cultural assets across Oxfordshire including collaborating with the Arts Council England's prioritised National Portfolio Organisations in the county.

Waste management

Crucial to a sense of pride in our places, is how we look after them. Oxfordshire's residents care about waste and how it's managed. It is a cornerstone service that residents have high expectations of from a convenience, environmental and public health perspective.

The county council's recent consultation (July - August 2025) on the future of our household waste recycling centres received record high levels of engagement with just under 5,900 responses to our survey. However, waste management in Oxfordshire is confusing. It is split across the two-tiers of local government with the city and district councils collecting waste and the county council disposing of it. Recycling responsibilities are split across the county and district councils.

The total spend on household waste management in the county[59] is around £68 million per year, about £33 million by the county council and £35 million collectively by the five districts. All district councils

operating services are delivered by the private sector, in house or through a wholly owned company of the local authority.

Serving nearly 320,000 households and handling approximately 300,000 tonnes of household waste per annum, **Oxfordshire has, for the last 11 years topped the recycling league table for counties**, with a recycling rate at over 56 per cent. These are firm foundations to build on.

Oxfordshire has a network of seven household waste recycling centres[60], which are managed by the county council mainly through a single contract. One Oxfordshire will continue to provide this efficiently for the county.

We have developed a circular economy plan, which has been adopted countywide and focuses on the power of integrated environmental strategies, strong leadership and positive changes to residents and business behaviours.

Our circular economy has the potential to deliver significant economic benefits – estimated at £400 - £500 million annually for Oxfordshire businesses and up to 7,000 new jobs, while also supporting community wealth building and local supply chains. Circular approaches foster resilience to global resource shocks, reduce waste management costs, and help protect biodiversity and public health.

Local government reorganisation offers huge potential for waste and recycling operations across Oxfordshire. It requires operational efficiency at scale.

One Oxfordshire will:

- Design and deliver a single waste collection and disposal service for all Oxfordshire, removing duplication, streamlining service delivery and enabling the needs of waste management to be effectively incorporated into wider plans and policies.
- Deliver greener waste collection routes by reducing the number of rounds by around 10 per cent (helped by the removal of internal boundaries) saving on carbon, vehicles, congestion and costs. This would also extend to litter, street cleansing and bulky waste collections.
- Offer improved commercial waste collections by working at scale and from multiple locations with a single set of collection schedules and standards, reducing confusion, improving compliance and generating income to help offset costs.
- Deliver targeted neighbourhood level campaigns (eg reduce, reuse and recycle) through area committees, community action groups, developing a clear sense of localism, civic activism and pride of place through a shared connection to our environment.

How we will deliver

To deliver One Oxfordshire, we need to have a clear way of working locally, countywide, regionally and nationally. We demonstrate how we will deliver better outcomes in a future landscape, unlocking devolution at scale through a mayoral strategic authority.

We illustrate how we will ensure the empowerment of communities and neighbourhoods through new area committees and strengthened democracy for residents and partners. We also set out how we will deliver a new council with supported and skilled councillors and through an operating framework that prioritises operational excellence, place shaping and prevention.

We clearly set out our transition plan and who should lead it. We demonstrate how One Oxfordshire offers the quickest, most cost effective and safest route to a safe, legal and confident new council, one that is ready to transform from day one.

One Oxfordshire presents the opportunity to fundamentally transform outcomes for residents, and provides a single connected access point for businesses, institutions and investors in the county. These changes will not take place in isolation; a new single unitary council will be working in a wider system of public service reform – supercharged by a mayoral strategic authority, new models for working with neighbourhoods as well as wider policy changes. It will be the strongest partner to other public sector organisations in the county, such as police, health and education, and the voluntary and community sector.

Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire

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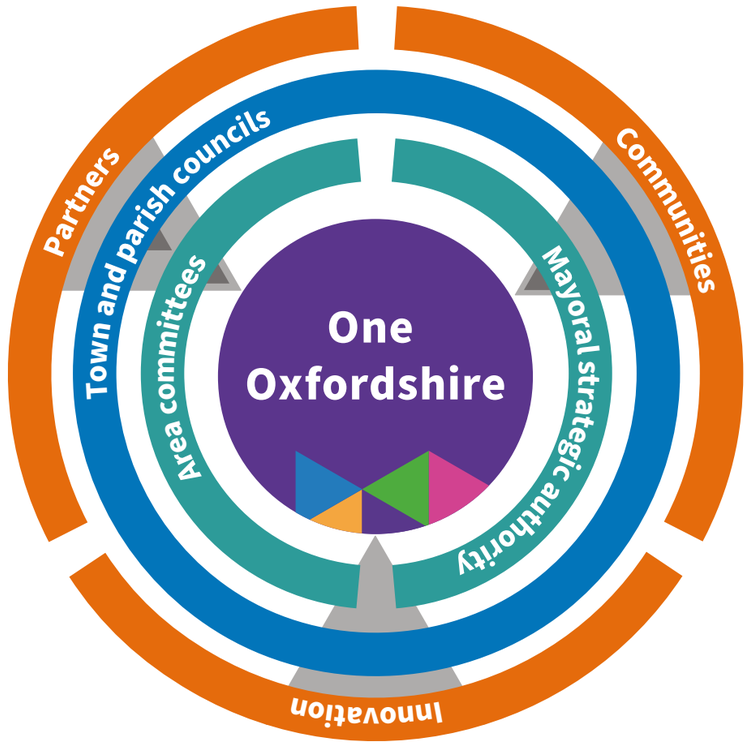
6. Our future operating framework

6.1 A new public service landscape



We have a once in a generation opportunity to grasp the benefits that our new public service landscape offers. One Oxfordshire does just that. Our framework for how we will work is underpinned by the strength of democratic representation in Oxfordshire. It puts our elected councillors at the centre, giving them a clear role from the most local to regional level as representatives of the communities and places they serve.

Delivering stronger outcomes for Oxfordshire relies on our ability to share data and insights between different organisations in this future way of working. Data and knowledge from our communities and partners will directly shape how we deliver services, as well as influence decisions taken at the mayoral strategic authority level. Together, we will turn local knowledge into countywide advantage.

Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority

Oxfordshire is working with authorities in Berkshire on the establishment of a Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority (MSA). This aims to harness the collective strengths of the urban centres, and its wider geographies, to unlock unparalleled opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth through devolution of functions, powers and associated funding. It provides a unique opportunity to shape the place and places within the Thames Valley – urban and rural – ensuring lasting benefits for current and future generations.

Oxfordshire has established cross border partnerships with Buckinghamshire Council to advance economic growth across our two counties, which we will use as part of ongoing discussions with Berkshire councils on the development of an MSA. We continue to have discussions with Swindon Borough Council on its possible future membership within a Thames Valley MSA.

An MSA, working in alignment with Oxfordshire Council, will unlock better outcomes by enabling more coherent policy making across strategic transport, housing, skills, economic development and investment strategies across these high-performing but disconnected areas. This simplified dual delivery model creates the clearest division of responsibilities between local and regional governance. Oxfordshire Council with all the capacity and capability for the whole county in one place creates a strong and stable partner for an MSA.

The proposed Thames Valley MSA will be able to leverage sectoral strengths – such as digital and professional services in Berkshire; and life sciences and advanced manufacturing in Oxfordshire – into a unified and distributed growth model that connects this place, boosts housing, supports innovation and drives productivity.

By collaborating with member councils, the MSA will accelerate progress in solving the productivity challenge across the Thames Valley. **Together, we will use our complementary strengths to create integrated supply chains, expand labour market opportunities, and speed up innovation – driving a sustained return to productivity growth and increased revenue for UK PLC**.

Pan-regional plans such as a spatial development strategy and local growth plans with joint operating principles offer a structured and long-term strategic planning environment that provides stability and clarity to businesses, developers and the investment community.

Co-ordinating the transition to a new single unitary and an MSA at the same time will avoid repeated disruption to services, particularly for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. A shadow MSA and an Implementation Executive – a group that will be set up to govern the reorganisation – will play a key role in ensuring a smooth transition, developing strategic plans, governance structures and financial frameworks before powers are transferred. One Oxfordshire will significantly limit disruption at a time when the MSA is being established with Berkshire councils joining as existing unitary authorities.

MSA geography

Leaders across the region have discussed the governance model of a combined county authority. **Overall the combined population of the two areas is approximately 1,740,000 – Oxfordshire at 763,218 and Berkshire at 979,000**. This meets the government's criteria for a population exceeding 1.5 million. The precedent has been set for where a large authority is joined in an MSA alongside many smaller authorities to create a sensible population size ratio, especially in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester.

An informal member working group has formed to consider voting parity across the region and representation on a proposed Strategic Authority Board. The importance of balancing county representation against several smaller unitary councils in Berkshire has been recognised. Equally, so has the need to balance representation on the board between the urban city and rural areas of Oxfordshire.

While voting arrangements have yet to be defined by the Devolution Bill or in discussions with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the intention is clear that the identity of Oxfordshire should be represented at regional level.

One Oxfordshire is the only local government reorganisation proposal for the county that advocates for the whole of Oxfordshire, a recognised functional economic area. It supports the government's wider devolution goals.

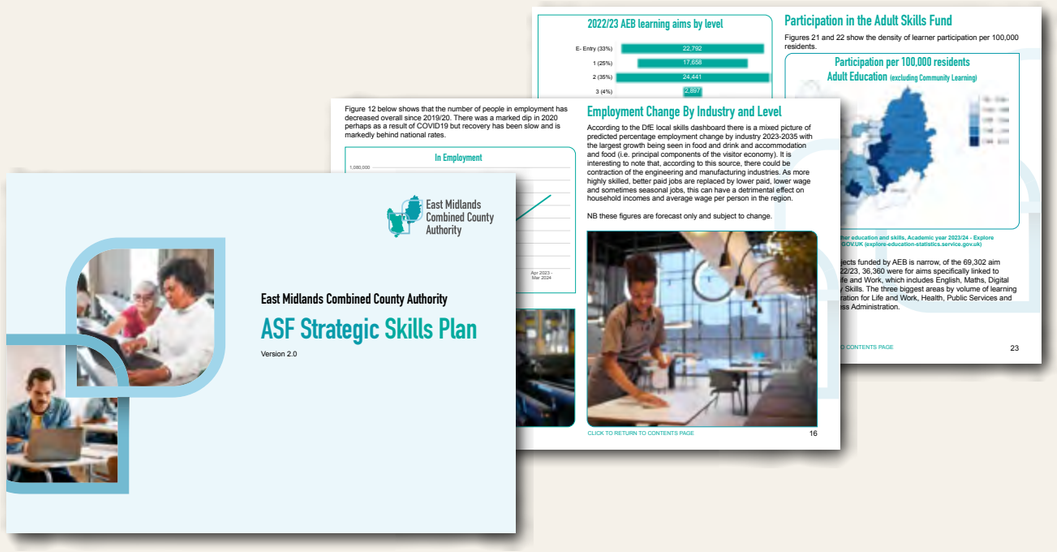
One Oxfordshire will:

- Speak and act coherently, confidently and competently at the MSA table – generating the confidence of stakeholders including the investor community and government partners such as Homes England.
- Offer the strongest and clearest possible governance to drive an increase in productivity and revenue for UK PLC through a single local growth plan and spatial development strategy, collaborating with partners for collective economic benefit.
- Offer a financially resilient and economically strong council for partners across the region, government and the commercial sector to collaborate with.
- Provide a clear and recognisable anchor institution for inter-regional initiatives such as the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and England's Economic Heartland.
- Offer a single front door for engagement with government, investors, and strategic partners – clarity is vital for MSAs, which require strong local partners to deliver devolved powers effectively.
- Be best placed to support the creation of a Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Service accountable to a Thames Valley mayor, supporting devolution arrangements.

East Midlands strategic skills plan

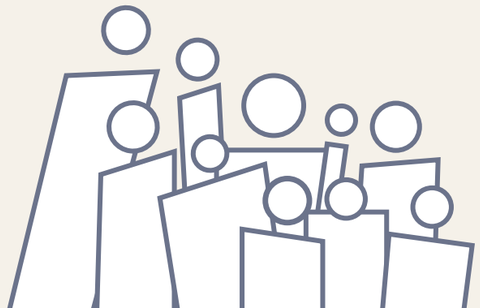
The East Midlands Combined County Authority Adults Skills Fund (ASF) Strategic Skills Plan[61] illustrates how the devolved ASF is being used to align national programmes with local priorities.

It demonstrates the importance of embedding skills planning across transport, housing and economic development strategies. Fragmented approaches risk undermining coherence and delivery. At a time when Oxfordshire is undergoing unitarisation, fragmenting the engagement with education providers on housing, transport and planning policy could inhibit good skills planning and impact the development of skills policy at a regional level.



CLAIRE WARD
MAYOR OF THE
EAST MIDLANDS

East Midlands Combined County Authority



6.2 Building One Oxfordshire

One Oxfordshire presents the clearest opportunity to harness the benefits devolution offers. We will build a new and ambitious way of working from firm foundations, designing a future council delivering high quality public services that is closer to its communities, connects our people and our places and is cost effective.

Communities and partners will be at the heart of how it operates, working collaboratively to listen, learn and drive innovation for the county.

One Oxfordshire will be designed by innovation, driven and shaped by our experienced and skilled workforce, partners and communities – rural and urban – and their needs. We will optimise on the opportunities afforded by partnership working, economies of scale and technology and a strong financial base.

Innovate Oxfordshire

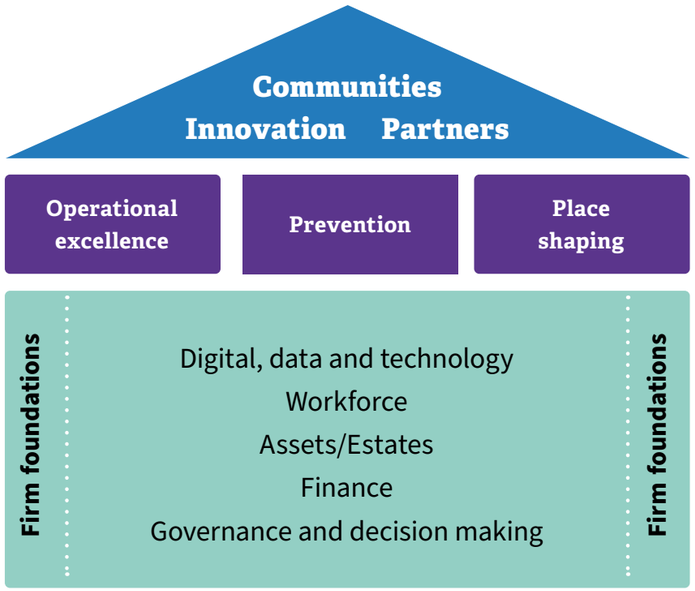
Innovate Oxfordshire is Oxfordshire County Council's self-funded innovation service, working in cutting edge partnerships to deliver better public sector services for residents, driven by their need and experience.

innovate Oxfordshire

Approximately 150 projects have been delivered over a decade, supporting organisations to test, refine and scale new ways of working or ideas using advanced technology to bridge the gap between innovation and business as usual. This has helped to position Oxfordshire at the forefront of UK innovation.

One leading area is connected and autonomous vehicles, where 28 projects have been delivered, including Innovate UK-funded MultiCAV[62] – the first electric autonomous bus to operate on the public highway. Oxfordshire fosters innovation, delivering tangible economic, technological and societal benefits at scale.

Our strategic focus



One Oxfordshire will have a strategic focus across three areas:

Operational excellence	Prevention	Place shaping
We will get the basics right for our residents and businesses. We will prioritise effective operational services – delivered on time, to expectation, every time. One Oxfordshire will use the best in class technology and ways of working to ensure processes are slick and efficient, freeing up resident, councillor and employee time to focus on where they can add the greatest value.	We will leverage our financial position to invest in prevention across all our services. By combining local and strategic perspectives, we will create places where communities in the county thrive. We will draw on operational data and strategic insights to get ahead of demand, harnessing innovation to develop different approaches that prevent needs escalating.	We will draw on all local government powers and partnership influence. We will adopt a long-term view, building our capabilities through data, insights and community feedback. In partnership, we will set out a bold vision for our places, developing and delivering better and more affordable housing, transport and work opportunities for all in safe, welcoming environments.

Our commitments

Our firm foundations across our places, people and partnerships create the optimal conditions for One Oxfordshire to succeed. From these, we will make a number of commitments.

We will shape governance and decision making which puts communities at its heart.

We will:

- Combine local knowledge with a strategic experienced perspective to make the right decisions in a timely way based on what our communities need.
- Work together with our area committees to drive a culture of localism through elected councillors, residents and stakeholders.
- Be well governed and well led, making decisions in the public interest with a clear vision for Oxfordshire.
- Leverage our research and evaluation partnerships with the University of Oxford, Oxford Brookes University and University College London and others to operate a unique ‘test, learn and grow’ community motivated to deliver transformative public services.
- Listen to and actively involve residents, communities and partners in shaping services.

We will maintain strong levels of financial sustainability through a focus on good financial leadership and management.

We will:

- Be a financially sustainable council for all Oxfordshire, protecting the county from future financial shocks.
- Give confidence to our partners such as the voluntary and community sector and investors to work with us for the long-term.
- Be responsible with public money but seize opportunity by taking appropriate risks that drive community benefit.

We will use our assets to be closer to communities, drive collaboration with partners and support inclusive growth.

We will:

- Deliver a service focused asset strategy that reflects good public value, while enabling residents to access services where it makes sense for their communities.
- Have buildings that communities can be proud of that are warm and welcoming for employees, residents and partners.
- Share our buildings with communities and partners, enabling improved coordination of outcomes through the co-location of services and workforces.
- Be based in buildings across the county – providing visibility of employees and the council across the places of Oxfordshire.

We will have a workforce committed to public values and delivering the best for Oxfordshire.

We will:

- Be customer focused and always aim to exceed expectations.
- Be an employer of choice, attracting, retaining and engaging the best talent from within and outside of the sector that reflects our communities, offering a diverse range of career pathways and opportunities.
- Embed a values-based culture where employees work side by side with others including the NHS, Thames Valley Police and our voluntary and community sector sector to achieve common goals.
- Ensure that employees are confident and competent users of digital tools and AI to drive efficiency and productivity so that they can focus on delivering the most value for residents.
- Embed continuous improvement and best practice from other councils to continually do better.

We will invest in digital, data and technology, recognising the role this plays as the foundation for our future ways of working.

We will:

- Invest in technology and data to drive digital ways of working that increase the understanding of our people, communities and places to enable 21st century services.
- Streamline processes and deliver efficiencies that will enable investment in the human contact our vulnerable residents need.
- Promote a digital-first customer experience, with an emphasis on 'getting it right first time' and foster a culture of digital innovation and capability.
- Use data and insight to inform what we do and how we do it – meet residents' immediate and long-term needs, acting on feedback and anticipating changing requirements.

6.3 Neighbourhood governance

One Oxfordshire will be tested by its ability to engage and empower the voice of all its communities in the creation of a council that embraces local knowledge as part of designing and delivering innovation in public service delivery.

While Oxfordshire Council will be able to comfortably operate at scale, regionally and nationally, through One Oxfordshire, we will also foster a culture of localism. We will work with our partners, residents, town and parish councils and elected councillors to bring the council closer to its communities.

A localised approach to delivery

Oxfordshire's identity is rooted within all the different places that, put together, form our remarkable county. From urban spaces to historic towns, rural and semi-rural villages, these places form the basis of our communities and a sense of localism. One Oxfordshire's operating model is purposefully anchored in this sense of place, recognising that meaningful public service must be shaped by our partners and communities to ensure we design and deliver innovative public services that meet the needs of each locality.

With 763,000 residents, localised delivery is essential. It enables Oxfordshire to operate at scale while remaining deeply connected to the people and places it serves. As the council grows in its delivery, it will be hardwired to feel more present, responsive and embedded in the everyday lives of our communities.

We will build this from the firm foundations of existing delivery arrangements across our district councils, as well as in adult and children's services and public health. We will also respond to emerging national drivers and opportunities, continuing to deliver a neighbourhood NHS health and care partnership to enable better outcomes for our people. **This will be amplified by having a strong presence across the county to visibly deliver services from – co-locating with our public sector partners making best use of our public estate, wherever possible, to share learning and drive innovation**.

This is how the new council will ensure that scale strengthens, rather than dilutes, its connection to place. A key delivery mechanism for delivering at a local level is through a network of area committees and through town and parish councils.

This localised approach is not just about governance – it is a direct expression of a preventative and place shaping approach. By unlocking the value of local assets such as green spaces and community centres, One Oxfordshire will enable the use of area committees and town and parish councils for health promotion, social connection and lifelong learning. Done collaboratively and in partnership with local stakeholders, this model supports people to live healthier and more connected lives.

Area committees

Oxfordshire has active and engaged communities – built up over hundreds of years – and spanning the length and breadth of the county. Some areas, however, have more

civic resource than others and a new council must harness this to provide the conditions to foster and deliver a strong culture of localism.

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny undertook exploratory work[63] to outline opportunities for localising One Oxfordshire.

"A huge variety of arrangements exist for neighbourhood and community activity, some of it supported by principal authorities but much of it not. Arrangements will need to maintain the ecosystem of neighbourhood governance where it is already strong and bolster it where it isn't – reflecting our earlier findings on asymmetry. The focus will need to be on the strengthening of the connective tissue associated with neighbourhood-based activity rather than necessarily "doing more" of that activity – thereby increasing community resilience. This is why we see this work strengthening and deepening the commitments made by councils across the area through the Oxfordshire Charter."

(The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, 2025)

Its work highlighted that elected councillors must play a greater role in civic life by acting as "community convenors". Councillors must bring together local residents, town and parish councils, businesses and partners to shape services locally. They will encourage community involvement and action, especially in places and for people that need extra help to thrive. Empowerment at the grassroots means progress for all. Councillors will need ongoing support to do this consistently well.

A set of shared principles will guide the design and implementation of these committees.

One Oxfordshire's area committees will:

- Align with health, policing and transport units to facilitate sensible and meaningful liaison between different public sector agencies.
- Serve as forums to bring together stakeholders and elected councillors to develop key priorities for local service or infrastructure improvements.
- Develop their own priorities, recognising that different neighbourhoods will have different needs.

This neighbourhood focus will visibly empower frontline councillors, residents and communities to make local decisions through area committees. It will help residents feel more involved and have a bigger say in what happens in their local area, while also connecting our people and our places better across the county.

Structures and governance

One Oxfordshire proposes the creation of 15 area committees to share in the design, delivery and stewardship of local priorities, services and assets.

These committee geographies provide a healthy balance between being reflective of the places of Oxfordshire and offering a sustainable, cost effective method of delivery and alignment to existing public sector boundaries. They offer the greatest opportunities for the potential alignment of future integrated neighbourhood teams with our NHS to deliver health and wellbeing services formed from established relationships, shared data and a common understanding of local needs.

The final number, name, geography and design – including any decision making, budget and grant giving functions – of area committees will be subject to early engagement and consultation with residents, town and parish councils and public sector partners. It's essential that One Oxfordshire gets this right from the start to create a lasting structure and way of working.

We expect that area committees will be built around our market towns, larger villages and neighbourhoods within the city.

A worked example of 15 area committees could be structured around the following geographies:

- Abingdon, Kennington and Radley
- Banbury
- Bicester
- Burford, Carterton and surrounding villages
- Chipping Norton and surrounding villages
- Didcot, Cholsey and Wallingford
- Faringdon, Grove and surrounding villages
- Harwell, Shrivenham and Wantage
- Henley, Goring, Watlington and surrounding villages
- Kidlington, Yarnton and Begbroke
- Oxford – central
- Oxford – east
- Oxford – north and west
- Thame, Wheatley and surrounding villages
- Witney and surrounding villages

We expect that on occasion, an Oxford Committee, drawn from the three area committees covering the city, may need to meet about cross-city issues. A similar arrangement can also be used for all other committees.

We have heard that our residents want to see a council that is cost effective, and our partners want to streamline engagement across councils in Oxfordshire. It is important to emphasise that through these committees we must reduce, not add to, current levels of governance across the public sector.

The work of our area committees will be run in an effective, efficient and data led way. Area profiles would be created to better understand our places and our people, which will allow for targeted work to take place on local initiatives. This will drive better outcomes for residents and secure investment.

As a result of the strong financial resilience offered by One Oxfordshire, a single council can create, embed and, above all, sustain these structures and ways of working for the long-term.

We have heard accounts of similar structures across the country reducing in size, scale and impact as a result of budget cuts – this can impact how much people trust their democratic institutions and can create a story of loss, instead of a story of localism. One Oxfordshire will change that story.

Area committees future management possibilities:

- parks and green spaces
- community development and cultural activities
- business and economic development
- tourism
- social housing estate management, where appropriate.
- community transport
- community centres
- recycling
- cemeteries and churchyards
- public toilets
- leisure
- markets
- climate change resilience
- community safety / neighbourhoods
- loneliness / volunteering
- street naming and numbering.

Communities unit

A range of officers across the county and districts currently play a role in supporting co-production, community action and locality working. One Oxfordshire will create a new communities unit that will draw on (and better coordinate) some of this existing activity, boosting it with resource to support and grow community-based activity. We will "develop the connective tissue" that the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny outlined in its research report for Oxfordshire.

Councillors and their area committees will get the support they need from the communities unit with an officer aligned to each committee. The goal is to build strong working relationships between councillors, council employees, local communities, and other partners. The communities unit will have a visible presence within communities and on the council's website.

The communities unit will:

- Assist accessing external funds to support local activity.
- Help to link up complementary activity to support local people in different neighbourhoods and areas.
- Support town and parish councils in areas.
- Help build new user-centred services and facilities.

Relational constitution

"There is the need, at the local level, to be able to specify what the relationships should be between traditional governance arrangements and new systems for deliberation, co-production and co-design. All councils are obliged to agree a constitution to set out the way that it will function as an institution. We have suggested an evolved model – a "relational" constitution – that seeks to explore and define how the council will work with its partners, and the local community – setting out clear, consistent and transparent rules and arrangements. A relational constitution would therefore not just be about how the council makes decisions but about how people from across the area (and public service partners) come together to deliberate and decide."

(Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, 2025)

The county council has many best practice examples of two-way empowered engagement delivered with residents and its stakeholders, including democratic involvement of Oxfordshire's residents and communities in influencing policy and decision making.

These will be built on and embedded into the design of Oxfordshire Council's new constitution. This will set out this "relational" approach with our residents and stakeholders to ensure that the new council will listen and work with people to design and shape services.

Citizens' assembly

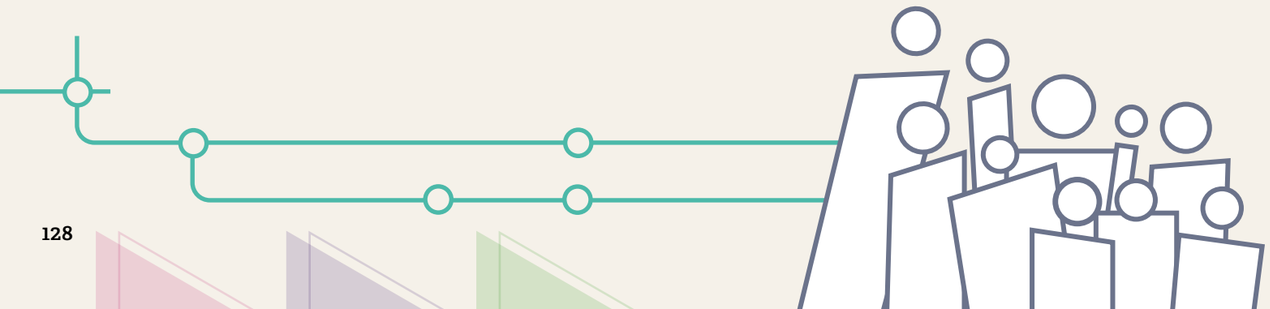
In February and March 2025, the county council's first ever citizens' assembly took place to explore a complex challenge: how Oxfordshire's transport system could support people's health, the local economy and the environment by 2050.

The county council commissioned Mutual Gain to design and deliver the assembly with 34 residents recruited to be broadly representative of Oxfordshire. After over 45 hours of structured learning and deliberation, the assembly developed 20 ambitious and deeply considered recommendations. Sixteen of the recommendations secured over 80 per cent support from assembly participants (a measure used to give confidence for similar support from a wider population).

The county council agreed the assembly's recommendations in July 2025 and allocated funding to support any follow-up work. We are committed to continuing to work with assembly members in the future. We have already engaged members on proposals for a temporary congestion charge and OxRAIL 2040 (the council's plan to improve rail transport).

"Oxfordshire's citizens' assembly on travel and transport marks a significant moment in local democratic engagement. MutualGain would like to thank Oxfordshire County Council for its continued commitment to embedding the citizens' assembly process into its decision-making. This approach reflects good practice in deliberative democracy and supports more inclusive, transparent, and community-informed policymaking."

(MutualGain, 2025)



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Community wealth building

Oxfordshire's approach to community wealth building focuses on rebuilding the connection between the people and the places that create wealth and those who benefit from it. Community wealth building works with local communities to make financial power work for them, encouraging fair employment and progressive procurement.

The county council has worked with partners and communities to build a deep understanding of Oxfordshire's local economy. This has included working with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) to produce a report around spending in Oxfordshire. This report is directly influencing our work on progressive procurement, which aims to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits associated with our spending power.

Town and parish councils

Oxfordshire's town and parish councils (local councils) are the first tier of local government. They are integral to continued democratic and community engagement and local delivery as they are now – delivering services on behalf of district councils and the county council. Building on the firm foundations of the existing co-produced Oxfordshire Councils' Charter, there is an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the first tier and Oxfordshire Council.

Connected councils

Some of our parishes and towns are well established and have the right capacity and capability to do more, and some less so. Some are concerned that they will have assets and services 'dumped' on them. One Oxfordshire will embed deeper working with town and parish councils as a key partner to design and deliver Oxfordshire Council.

By working more closely with local councils, elected county councillors and officers can get early insights about local issues and can develop a deeper understanding of local priorities. We can also, together, act quickly to prevent problems from getting worse. Oxfordshire Council will be designed to listen – the insights from local councils are essential to this so we can together design and deliver innovative public services that connect with residents.

To do this, we will work with all parishes and towns within the new area committee arrangement to support them to participate, as much as they want to, in the success of their places. One Oxfordshire will ensure that town and parish councils have a clear, dedicated point of contact within our communities unit.

Local councils also play a critical role in shaping the future of their places. The new area committees will give them a chance to work together with neighbouring local councils, rather than competing against each other, when planning new housing developments and community programmes. Working together like this will help build a spirit of localism.

One Oxfordshire will ensure that assets and services can be devolved to a hyper-local level where it makes sense to do so. We will work more closely with Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils to share resources. This includes the design and delivery of a learning and development programme and creation of an advice hub for technical matters, such as websites and information governance.

Oxford and modern charter trustees

Oxford is a city in its own right with 166,034 residents. It has a dynamic economy with globally recognised universities. In 1974, Oxford's status was changed to a district council but was named Oxford City Council as it held the city status by royal charter.

The creation of Oxfordshire Council requires significant care and respect to ensure the city, and its identity and brand, is maintained for current and future generations.

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While the majority of the city is unparished, parts of it are served by four parish councils and a network of civic and neighbourhood organisations that embed the collective spirit of the city into social action.

One Oxfordshire will ensure that the city status of Oxford is not lost and will appoint charter trustees to hold civic responsibilities. The charter trustees would elect a lord mayor for Oxford on an annual basis. However, this role needs to be more modern and more purposeful beyond its current form.

Modern charter trustees must play a strong, visible and supported role in the new council. They need to work closely with future committee chairs and the council's cabinet to provide a point for community, ceremonial, inward investment and economic issues within the city.

These arrangements will ensure Oxfordshire Council can meet the needs of the city and be custodians of it for future generations.

While government has been clear that councils must think carefully about the establishment of new town and parish councils, Oxfordshire Council, together with the modern charter trustees and the existing Oxford parishes – Blackbird Leys; Risinghurst and Sandhills; Littlemore and Old Marston; neighbourhood forums and Oxford Civic Society – will continually engage on democracy and participation at a city level. If needed, One Oxfordshire will request a community governance review for any further parishes or a town council for Oxford.

"The charter will help shape how Oxfordshire councils work together in partnership to support better service delivery and outcomes, and to work together to ensure thriving local democracy across the county[64]."

6.4 Elected community representation

Council size

We currently have 288 councillors in total across all six Oxfordshire councils. The creation of a single unitary authority in Oxfordshire presents a rare opportunity to reshape local governance around the needs of residents and the realities of councillor workloads. With the consolidation of services into one authority, councillors will take on a broader portfolio of responsibilities. The size of the council must reflect this shift, ensuring that elected councillors can remain accessible, responsive and effective. And crucially, operate closer to communities at their heart through the development of area committees.

In coming to a view on the number of councillors for the new council, we have taken account of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) guidance and had informal discussions with them.

We recognise, in full, the need to get as close as possible to the 'true' council size before a boundary review – which would be undertaken by the LGBCE in the first term of the new authority. However, as we have had a recent electoral review of Oxfordshire County Council, with new divisions elected to in May 2025, it is very challenging to achieve a fair and equal distribution of the electorate across the existing divisions until this boundary review takes place.

In the short-term, our preference is for 138 councillors representing 69 unitary wards, which would be fulfilled by the election of two councillors to each of the 69 county council divisions.

We believe it is better to accept a slightly larger council for the first term on the understanding that a boundary review will likely deliver a council represented by a little over 100 councillors at the following set of elections.

If the government was minded to ensure a council size of less than 138 for its first election, a council size of 119 is achievable, but not preferable, as some wards would only be served by one member with a larger portfolio of responsibilities. This sets out our initial thoughts only and we are committed to working with government, and with the support of LGBCE, to reach a firmer position.

This approach will guarantee continuity of service during the transition to a unitary authority and provides time to embed the new governance arrangements. It will allow the shadow authority to operate effectively from day one, with councillors able to engage with residents, manage casework and develop a greater understanding of the workload of the new council.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 6. Our future operating framework

Council size assessment for a single unitary authority in Oxfordshire[65]

No. councillors	Electorate (2029)	Electorate per councillor
69	581,560	8,428
108	581,560	5,385
119	581,560	4,887
138	581,560	4,214

Election cycles

Council	Electoral cycle
Oxfordshire County Council	All councillors, every four years
Cherwell District Council	By thirds
Oxford City Council	Half of all councillors, every two years
South Oxfordshire District Council	All councillors, every four years
Vale of White Horse District Council	All councillors, every four years
West Oxfordshire District Council	By thirds

The election cycle for the new authority will play a key role in shaping its effectiveness. Currently, Oxfordshire's councils operate on a mix of electoral cycles.

The creation of a single unitary council will streamline this process and become more cost-effective, moving to whole council elections every four years. This makes local government easier for residents to understand, lowers administrative costs and enables councillors to focus on long-term planning and delivery rather than short-term issues.

To support the delivery of One Oxfordshire and to transition to a newly designed council, we are requesting continuing authority status for Oxfordshire County Council. We believe this offers the quickest, most cost effective and safest route to a safe, legal and confident council, which is ready to transform from day one.

This is especially relevant to our devolution ambitions. Managing both reorganisation and devolution programmes in an integrated way from a single point, allows for clarity of direction and control. These are highly interdependent, high risk change programmes central to the delivery of the government's policy objectives. Continuing authority status is vital to achieve these objectives, allowing for a seamless transition for residents and stakeholders.

Parsons Street, Banbury

7. Transition plan and delivery

7.1 Overall approach

Who will deliver?

The county council already delivers services on a countywide footprint, providing 85 per cent of local government services by expenditure in Oxfordshire. We take our responsibility in this space seriously as we move through local government reorganisation. As such, we wish to be the continuing authority to lead and deliver the transition to a new and ambitious council. We will not remain static in this space but deliver transformation at pace and in partnership. Oxfordshire Council will be a new council.

We have the experience, financial resilience, "good" services and partnerships to lead One Oxfordshire. We will be able to retain the strengths of these services and build from the firm foundations they provide, deepening integration and operating at scale.

One Oxfordshire is the only proposal that removes the risk of disaggregation and fragmentation of services for Oxfordshire residents, allowing high quality service delivery to be prioritised and further improvements to be made.

One Oxfordshire offers undeniable financial resilience to do this. We will be able to absorb and withstand market and infrastructure cost fluctuations better than smaller unitary authorities, enabling the confident and continued delivery of good services, growth and investment.

The county council also has an experienced and flexible workforce, one that already operates locally, countywide, regionally and nationally. As well as critical and larger service delivery, we provide essential wraparound local services together with partners, such as personalised care, public health and schools. We have also operated within a joined up strategic partnership with Cherwell District Council.

This direct experience, knowledge and understanding of local services will be used for learning and developing a **new unified council** that can deliver both for the whole of Oxfordshire and at a hyperlocal level.

Acting as a continuing authority will provide the strongest, simplest route to delivering One Oxfordshire while maintaining service quality (especially for critical services) and mitigate system wide risk through enhanced controls and visibility.

We will build on firm foundations, using both the county council and district councils' strong service track record to successfully transition to Oxfordshire Council. We will also ensure we take full advantage of the opportunity local government reorganisation presents to transform our collective service offer for residents and together create a new council.

Our focus will be on a safe, legal and confident transition to vesting day that brings all councils across Oxfordshire together to create Oxfordshire Council.

Local government reorganisation and devolution are complex and interdependent programmes of change to deliver, especially against the backdrop of wider policy reforms across critical services. It is fully understood that an effective and collaborative set of change management programmes is essential to the successful launch of the new council and to realising the benefits outlined in this proposal.

Where needed, independent assurance will provide external scrutiny ensuring delivery remains on track and risks are identified and addressed early. By challenging assumptions and validating progress, independent assurance strengthens transparency and will build confidence among our stakeholders. This approach also supports continuous improvement and helps safeguard service continuity.

We fully recognise the scale and complexity of the challenge – delivering a fundamental transformation while maintaining high quality, uninterrupted services for residents across Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 7. Transition plan and delivery

Resource

We will build on the already established programme governance for both local government reorganisation and devolution – scaling as appropriate following the government's 'minded to' decision. We have already appointed a programme director for local government reorganisation and a programme director for devolution demonstrating our seriousness to move at pace and with certainty towards creating a new future for Oxfordshire.

We expect to scale up existing in-house expertise, capability and capacity for implementation, complementing this with use of a delivery partner to get to vesting day with maximum levels of certainty. We are keen to work collaboratively with district and city colleagues, change networks and structures, establishing joint programme and project management arrangements as soon as possible.

The county council has already developed an internal network of local government reorganisation and devolution ambassadors across its services. This will ensure a movement of change across the county council to understand and deliver change at all levels. We expect to replicate this across all councils so everyone is involved in the design and delivery of the new council.

Our approach will also be informed by learning from, and the experiences of, other newly established unitary councils, drawing on both best practice and lessons learned to shape a robust and resilient transition and change programme.

We are keen to work collaboratively with district and city colleagues, change networks and structures, establishing joint programme and project management arrangements as soon as possible.

Implementation framework

To successfully transition, we will adopt a structured yet adaptive framework that lays a solid foundation for transformation. This practical framework is informed by recent government guidance, sector expertise and best practices from ongoing local government reorganisation experiences in England.

By embedding these principles from the outset, Oxfordshire can create a resilient, responsive, and future-ready council capable of delivering better outcomes for residents, businesses, employees and partners.

The framework will:

- Balance strategic oversight to guide long-term vision and effective decision making.
- Ensure operational continuity to safeguard critical services.
- Have governance alignment to ensure clarity and accountability throughout the change.
- Include comprehensive stakeholder management and engagement practices to build trust and consensus.

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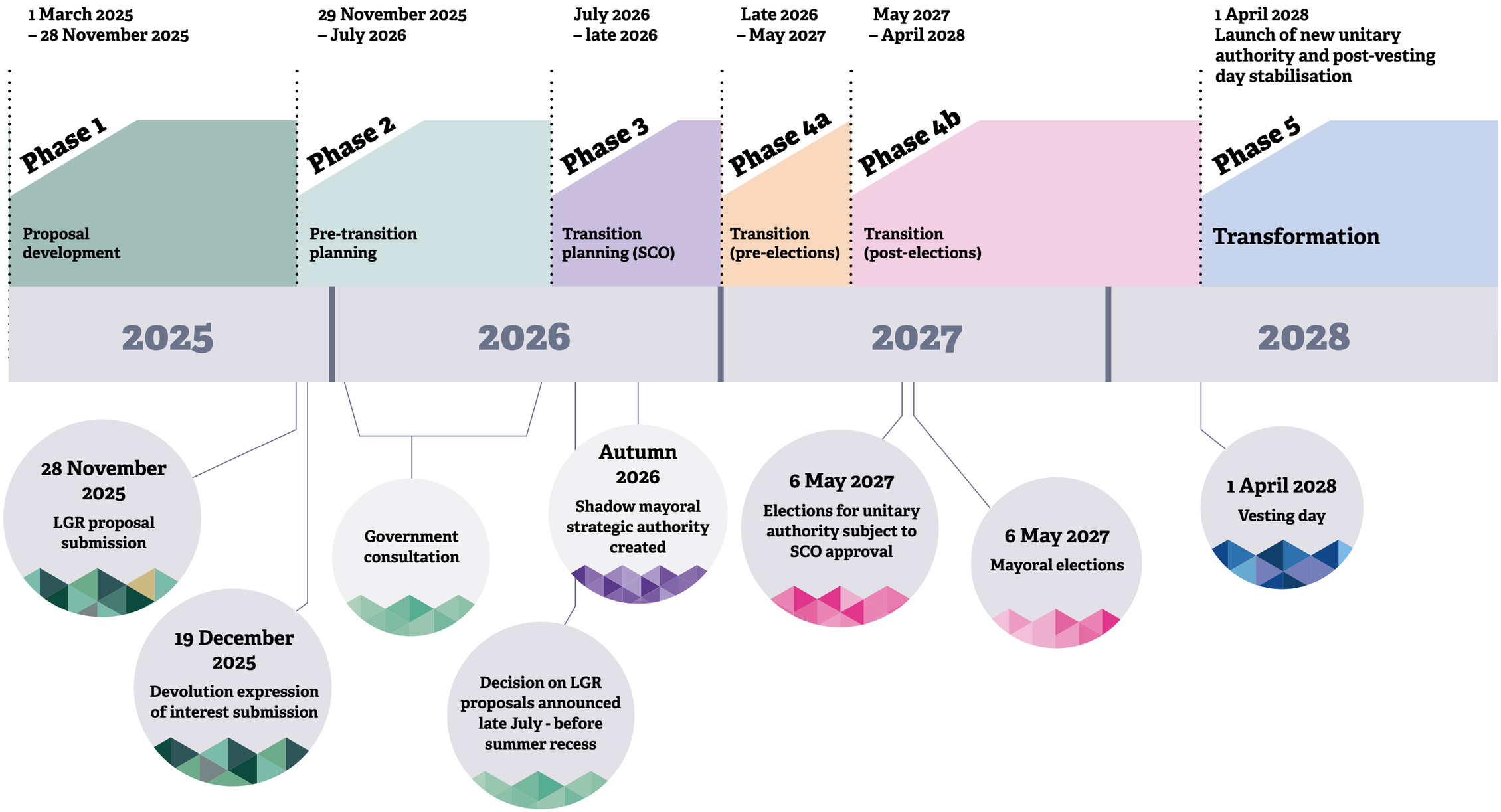
We will use the following implementation framework that illustrates four key pillars of activity for effective change:

Phases of change	Cross-cutting workstreams	Service level change	Managing risk and realising benefits
Phase 1 Proposal development	Vision and culture	Design subject matter expert led	Governance and decision making
Phase 2 Pre-transition planning	Organisational design	Tailoring consolidation by service requirements	Dedicated programme management office
Phase 3 Transition planning (structural changes order—SCO)	Service delivery models	Building on existing competence	Independent assurance
Phase 4a Transition (pre-elections)	People and HR	Effective governance	Risk management framework
Phase 4b Transition (post-elections)	Processes	Stakeholder communication and engagement	
Phase 5 Transformation	Digital, data and technology		
	Finance and commercial		
	Property and assets		
	Communication and engagement		
	Legal and governance		

7.2 Transition phases

Each phase of transition will be supported by a clear and robust governance including programme boards, gateway reviews and reporting. This means we have the ability to scale up or down as required throughout the programme and be independently assured as needed. This robustness will enable us to make the best use of our resources throughout the programme and ultimately realise the benefits of this proposal. The high level timetable for the phases of change is shown below.



Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 7. Transition plan and delivery

Phase 1 – Proposal development

Up to submission, 28 November 2025

During this phase, already underway, we have taken the time to understand the course of transition and transformation and started detailed mapping for the required phases.

We are using the insight, relationships and networks formed during our comprehensive stakeholder engagement that informed this proposal to foster further cooperation and engagement across Oxfordshire for all phases.

Collaboration with city and district council chief executives and officers has been good to date but requires strengthening to position us well for continued success in the future.

Phase 2 – Pre-transition planning

December 2025 to July 2026

Councils will agree the principles for working in a collaborative, open and transparent way ensuring successful continuation of services during transition. These principles will apply to all employees involved in any work associated with local government reorganisation and devolution.

The pre-transition planning phase will provide an opportunity to get ahead – understanding risks to a greater extent, exploring new ways of working / pathways with partners in time for the government's decision. This work will be done in an outcome agnostic way together with city and district colleagues.

Specifically, further data collection, baselining and the mapping of deliverables for vesting day will take place in areas including finance, staffing establishment, contracts, IT systems, estates and the wider service portfolio of our district councils.

Our focus will be on readiness and enabling a smooth shift into the transition planning phase by understanding the opportunities, risks and mitigations.

A programme and project management structure with a dedicated programme management office (PMO) will be designed and agreed. It will have the capacity and capability to lead and manage the interdependent programmes for reorganisation and devolution.

This structure will hold responsibility for overseeing and driving the future change,

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | 7. Transition plan and delivery

providing essential assurance across both programmes. This team will be built from the talent that exists across all Oxfordshire councils ensuring the success of both programmes from day one and beyond. It will consist of change and transformation experts, project, programme managers, PMO specialists and business analysts.

Subject matter experts provide crucial institutional knowledge and expertise and will form an integral part of the design of the programme and project management structure. Colleagues seconded into the PMO or project teams will be backfilled where necessary, with a likely need for external capacity and recruitment throughout the lifecycle of the programme. Workstreams and governance arrangements will be identified and designed.

Each workstream will have a clear remit and defined lead with teams drawn from county and district councils. These workstreams will deliver essential outputs, including plans, new systems and transitional arrangements to ensure Oxfordshire Council's effective launch and ongoing transformation.

Work within all existing authorities will be reviewed to identify activities that can be paused or stopped, enabling existing resource redeployment. Additional technical capacity and a delivery partner may be required during the various elements of the programme. The implementation costs will be met through internal resources.

The work covered in this phase will conclude with the development of a transition plan.

Phase 3 – transition planning

Government decision to structural changes order expected to be end 2026

The focus in this phase will be on working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to shape the structural changes order (SCO), establish parameters for the transition and confirm our desire to have continuing authority status. We will continue to work with partners on the transition plan, the design and resourcing of the PMO and its governance.

Once we know the government's decision, we will begin the process of establishing an Implementation Executive to govern the transition and make the necessary decisions associated with transition to a future council. The full membership of that committee will be determined by the SCO.

We will also establish a time limited independent Oxfordshire Advisory Board made up of key stakeholders, including representatives from businesses, civic, voluntary and community organisations and educational institutions. This will provide critical friend challenge to the Implementation Executive on the design and implementation of the new council.

This maintains continuity while addressing potential risks, particularly for partners, and activates improvement opportunities. This phase will ensure clarity on change leadership so we can move safely and at pace, laying the foundations for standing up workstreams towards the transition phase.

Phase 4a – Transition (pre-elections)

Structural changes order to elections May 2027

We will work closely with the Implementation Executive mandated by the SCO, who will be integral in setting our ambitions for vesting day and beyond. It will direct the core activities, including spending controls, laying foundations for new strategies, plans and policies, and communicating to colleagues and residents.

During this phase, we will also provide leadership in policy formulation, strategic planning and business case development to ensure the range of opportunities offered by our proposal are fully realised by the new council.

We will stand up a number of workstreams to design, plan and deliver the new arrangements. They will prioritise service continuity to ensure effective delivery of services and maintain excellent performance.

Workstreams will be split into two broad categories, corporate (cross cutting) workstreams and service specific workstreams.

Phase 4b – Transition (post-elections)

2027 election – Day prior to vesting day 2028

The planning work started in previous phases will continue but the elections will now provide an opportunity for key decisions to be taken, for example, around appointing senior officers, agreeing strategies and budgets. These will be identified, planned and delivered from within the workstreams outlined in phase 4a.

New member governance will support a smooth transition towards a safe, legal and confident vesting day and provide a clear future vision for Oxfordshire Council. The key planning strategies perfected in the previous phases will be adopted by the future authority.

Phase 5 – Transformation

Vesting day onwards

On vesting day, Oxfordshire Council will be formally established through a systematic programme, embedding new services, transforming services and developing long-term strategies to support continuity and resilience, and aligning to the new operating framework.

IT systems and workforce structures will build on existing strengths, supporting continued service delivery and realising the opportunities offered by establishing a single authority. Empowering our communities, promoting a customer-focused approach, driving service effectiveness and efficiency through digital and other forms of innovation, and developing efficient support service arrangements will help drive radical change at pace while protecting delivery of frontline services.

7.3 Workstreams

Cross cutting workstreams

The successful transition to Oxfordshire Council will depend on the coordinated delivery of a wide range of cross-cutting and enabling workstreams. These workstreams represent the core building blocks of the new organisation and must be carefully scoped, sequenced and integrated to ensure a coherent, resilient and future-ready transformation.

Each workstream is interdependent and must be managed in alignment with the overall programme roadmap.

The approach will be to treat these workstreams as strategic enablers of change, ensuring that transition and subsequent transformation is not only technically sound but also culturally embedded and operationally sustainable.

The workstreams on the following pages will guide how services are designed and delivered, how people and systems interact and how the new council defines its identity and purpose.

Vision and culture

Embedding a new unified culture and strong leadership ethos will be critical to shaping the identity and effectiveness of the new council.

Our focus:

- **Values and behaviours:** Co-creating shared organisational values that reflect the vision of Oxfordshire Council.
- **Cultural integration:** Building on the legacy, strengths and identities of the organisations coming together, while building a cohesive and inclusive culture.
- **Bottom-up engagement:** Empowering our employees to shape the new culture through dialogue, involvement and ownership.
- **Leadership development:** Equipping our leaders at all levels to inspire, guide and support teams through the changes.

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Organisational design

The organisational structure will be designed to support both the immediate needs of transition and the long-term ambitions of the new council.

The creation of a new council requires the design of a fit for purpose operating model along with an organisational design and structure that supports strategic leadership, operational delivery and democratic accountability.

Our focus:

- **Leadership and governance model:** Defining and filling senior roles (as required) and establish governance structures to lead and oversee the new council.
- **Neighbourhood governance:** Establishing the new council's democratic framework and neighbourhood governance ambitions.
- **Functional alignment:** Grouping services into coherent directorates or portfolios based on strategic priorities and operational synergies.
- **Spans of control:** Establishing clear lines of accountability, decision making authority and reporting relationships.

Service delivery models

Service delivery models will be developed iteratively, with a focus on continuity, quality and innovation. Our initial focus will be on safe, legal and confident transfer of services for vesting day, with transformation taking place on day one and beyond.

Each service area will require a tailored delivery model that reflects its statutory obligations, operational complexity and community impact.

Our focus:

- **Map existing services:** Understanding delivery arrangements across current councils.
- **Assess integration opportunities:** Identifying where services can be aggregated or streamlined.
- **Design future state models:** Developing high level service blueprints that define scope, delivery channels and performance expectations.

People and human resources

The transition will significantly shape the workforce and organisational culture; a motivated, skilled and unified team is essential to delivering the vision of the new council.

Our focus:

- **Pay and reward:** Ensuring employees are paid correctly on day one.
- **Workforce planning:** Identifying staffing requirements, skills gaps and recruitment needs.
- **TUPE and employment law compliance:** Managing employee transfers in accordance with legal obligations.
- **Organisational development:** Supporting employees through change with training, coaching and engagement.
- **Employee engagement:** Creating channels for employees feedback, involvement and recognition.

Processes

Process design and optimisation are critical to ensuring that the new council operates efficiently and consistently.

Efficient processes will underpin service delivery, financial management and customer experience. Our aim will be to minimise disruption to customer experience on vesting day.

Our focus:

- **Process mapping and harmonisation:** Identifying and aligning key business processes across legacy councils.
- **Standard operating procedures (SOPs):** Developing SOPs for core functions to ensure consistency and compliance.
- **Workflow automation:** Exploring opportunities to automate routine tasks and improve productivity.
- **Process ownership and governance:** Assigning responsibility for process design, maintenance and improvement.

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Digital, data and technology

Digital infrastructure and data governance are key to the success of the new council.

Digital transformation will be a key enabler of efficiency, transparency and innovation.

Our focus:

- **Systems integration:** Consolidating IT platforms, applications and infrastructure to support unified operations.
- **Information management:** Designing and implementing a new unified information governance compliance structure and rolling out appropriate training.
- **Data migration and quality:** Ensuring accurate, secure and compliant transfer of data from legacy systems.
- **Digital service delivery:** Enabling online access to services and information for residents and employees.
- **Cybersecurity and resilience:** Implementing robust security protocols and disaster recovery plans.
- **Technology strategy:** Developing a digital roadmap aligned with organisational goals and resident needs.

Finance and commercial

Financial integrity and commercial agility are vital to long-term sustainability, with planning closely aligned to service priorities, risk management and transformation goals.

Our focus:

- **Budget consolidation:** Merging financial plans, reserves and liabilities across councils, establishing financial controls and reporting.
- **One financial platform:** Establishing a common financial system for budgeting, monitoring and auditing.
- **Commercial strategy:** Reviewing contracts, partnerships and income-generating opportunities.
- **Procurement frameworks:** Designing compliant and efficient procurement processes.
- **Funding and investment planning:** Identifying capital requirements and funding sources for transformation.
- **Banking and debtors management:** Establish unified banking arrangements and develop a strategy for managing legacy and future debtors.
- **Purchase to pay:** Establish unified purchase to pay systems and processes.

Property and assets

The new council will inherit a diverse portfolio of physical and digital assets. Effective asset management will support service delivery, financial sustainability and community engagement.

Our focus:

- **Asset inventory and valuation:** Cataloguing and assessing the value and condition of assets.
- **Ownership and transfer arrangements:** Managing the legal and operational aspects of asset transfer.
- **Estate strategy:** Developing a service focused strategy for office space, depots, community facilities and other assets.
- **Asset optimisation:** Identifying opportunities to rationalise, repurpose or divest assets.
- **Facilities management:** Ensuring continuity of maintenance, security and health and safety compliance.

Communication and engagement

The transition to the new council will require comprehensive programmes of communication and engagement both internally and externally.

Our focus:

- **Transition communications:** Managing communications and engagement with residents, employees and stakeholders, preparing them for change.
- **Employee and councillor communication and engagement:** Managing communication with employees and elected councillors from day one, ensuring effective engagement across the new council.
- **Resident and stakeholder communication and engagement:** Managing communication with residents, and partners from day one, presenting one coherent council to the public and keeping stakeholders informed and involved.
- **Media management:** Developing a clear, coordinated and consistent media management approach.
- **Branding:** Developing a single brand identity that supports the new culture and community engagement.

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Legal and governance

The establishment of the legal and governance framework for the new unitary authority is crucial to ensure a smooth and compliant transition from the predecessor councils.

Our focus:

- **Compliance:** Ensuring the development of all statutory compliance requirements for the new authority.
- **Decision making structures:** Agree the new authority's constitution to define governance and decision making structures.
- **Company structures:** Ensuring companies owned and operated by legacy councils are legally transferred and compliant.
- **Support other workstreams:** Legal will play a key role across finance and commercial workstreams, due diligence, supporting the HR and people workstream, information governance, procurement activities and advisory and assurance for the programme.
- **Effective decision making:** Support effective decision-making, new committee structures and delegation schemes.
- **Internal audit and counter fraud:** Establish a single operating model for internal audit and counter fraud services, including an internal audit plan and unified counter fraud strategy.

Service specific workstreams

Transitioning district council services to Oxfordshire Council must be managed carefully to avoid resident disruption and maintain service quality. Continuing authority status will be a key enabler for that. Effective implementation should prioritise positive outcomes for residents.

Service specific workstreams will be required to ensure continuity and integration of frontline services. These workstreams will include, but are not limited to, waste; street scene and highways; regulatory services; housing; planning and economic development; and communities. These will be in addition to workstreams for services such as adult and children's social care; public health; libraries; culture and museums.

Not all services will require the same approach to transition. The council recognises that some services, particularly those involving vulnerable populations or statutory responsibilities, carry higher risks and complexities. As such, our implementation strategy will take into account service type, operational dependencies, level of aggregation required and risk exposure.

The migration process will not be uniform. It will vary depending on the nature of the service, the capacity of existing delivery partners and the needs of local communities. For this reason, we expect to work with stakeholders to define the model and process for understanding the kinds of transitions and transformations different services will undergo. Lessons learned internally and through external networks will assist in the design and implementation of new service delivery models.

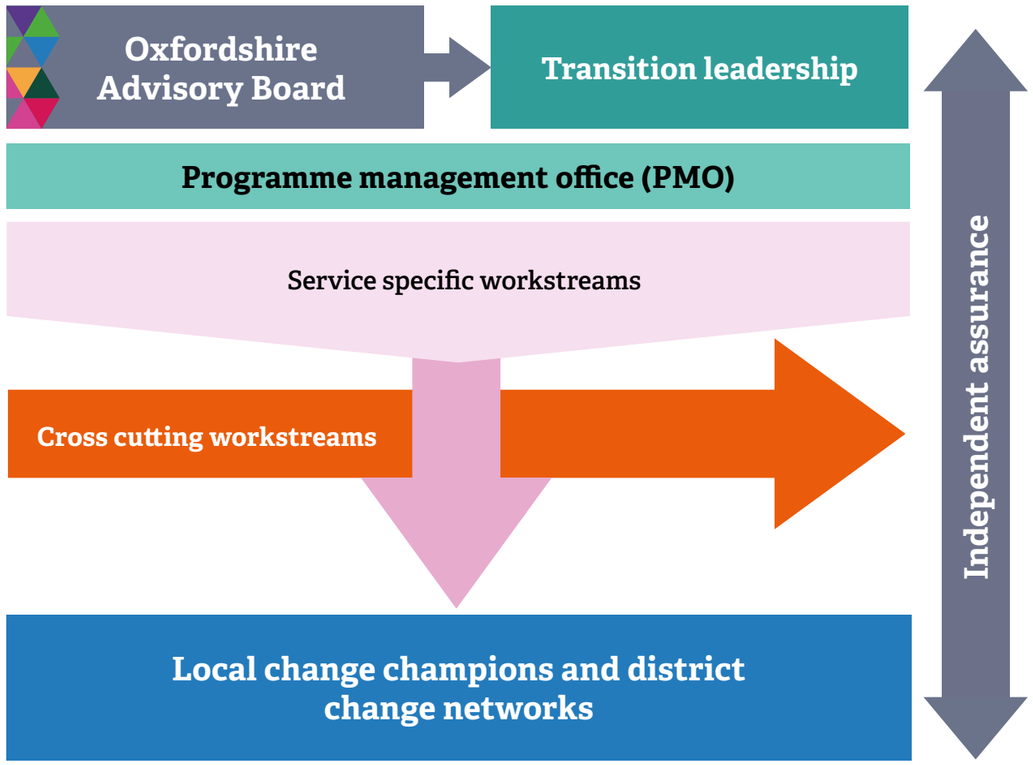
Four key considerations are essential for a successful transition:

1. Teams within services requiring consolidation will lead the design, planning and change implementation, supported by the wider programme team, governance structure and PMO. This ensures the right skills and capabilities are in place, recognising that those with the most knowledge and experience are best placed to shape the future operating model.

2. The concept of "migrating to the most competent platform" is central. This concept recognises that today, services are delivered by multiple authorities with differing levels of resource, capability, maturity and resilience. In some areas, excellence already exists and can be scaled. In others, fragmentation has led to duplication, confusion for residents and avoidable costs. The transformation process will seek to both consolidate and elevate – building on strengths, addressing weaknesses and designing services that are fit for the future.

3. Effective governance boards will provide robust challenge and oversight, aided by additional expertise as needed.

4. Clear resident and stakeholder engagement with those that might or will be affected is crucial.



7.4 Managing risk and realising benefits

Delivering a successful transition to Oxfordshire Council requires a balanced and proactive approach to managing risk while ensuring the realisation of long-term benefits and value.

While the scale and complexity of change present inherent challenges, robust risk management and disciplined tracking will ensure the One Oxfordshire programme remains resilient, focused and capable of delivering its expected benefits.

Risk management framework

A robust risk management framework will be adopted to support the safe and effective delivery of the transition to Oxfordshire Council. This framework will include clear escalation protocols to ensure that risks are identified early, assessed consistently and mitigated proactively across all programme phases. It will be embedded within the PMO and aligned with governance structures to enable timely decision making and accountability.

Ongoing liaison with external regulators and service commissioners will be maintained to ensure statutory obligations are met and service quality standards upheld. Regular liaison will also take place with external audit. This approach will further help safeguard continuity, ensure public value and build confidence in the transition process.

We will apply the principles of effective risk management to support the transition and transformation. This approach follows the county council's risk management framework, which reviews risks at a corporate, directorate and service level while also ensuring that cross-cutting risks are captured to ensure appropriate assessment, mitigation, review and scrutiny.

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Risk theme	Risk area	Mitigations
Financial uncertainty	While we have estimated the implementation costs for reorganisation in Oxfordshire there is a level of uncertainty in the detail of what needs to be delivered, meaning this may be insufficient. Additionally, key areas of concern for transition include: **1.** The risk of councils running down reserves or accruing additional debt beyond existing medium-term strategies. **2.** The impact of following the structural changes order, which may result in additional investment or delay realisation of savings opportunities. **3.** The requirement to continue business as usual, including securing sustainable savings alongside preparing for the transition to the new unitary council.	▶ Develop robust financial plans and conduct independent cost-benefit analysis. ▶ One Oxfordshire will offer sufficient scale to manage the implementation and financial risk effectively and secure necessary upfront investment in people and resources. ▶ Strong governance and control mechanisms. ▶ Independent assurance and scrutiny. ▶ Close monitoring of costs will be conducted throughout the entire plan, with any escalation addressed promptly.
The loss of service continuity	Disruption to public services during transition would affect resident confidence and satisfaction.	▶ Phased implementation, clear service continuity plans and early and effective collaboration and resourcing will help mitigate this risk.
Data and systems integration	Misalignment of IT systems and data migration across merging councils.	▶ Conduct early application and data audits given scale; invest in integration platforms; ensure data governance and security.
Governance complexity and decision making	Over the course of the reorganisation there will be changes to decision making powers, roles and responsibilities. If there is a lack of clarity on the leadership and decision making arrangements during the transition process this may delay implementation activities and increase costs. Without due care there could be risk to current service delivery and delays to the benefits of implementing One Oxfordshire.	▶ Robust governance needs to be established early in pre-transition, be clear, effective and agreed in collaboration. It will need to adapt throughout the process as we move between phases, and we have planned ‘pause and reflect’ moments to assess what is working well and what needs to change for the next phase. ▶ Establish clear governance structures; appoint and involve new leaders early, ensure transparency.

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Risk theme	Risk area	Mitigations
Capacity, capability and morale	Limited internal capacity and capability to manage transformation alongside business as usual activities could lead to employee morale and retention issues. If change is not managed effectively and the workforce not sufficiently engaged, this may damage employee morale, disrupt services and limit retention of the skills and roles for the new organisations.	▶ Early engagement of the workforce across all existing organisations will enable colleagues to be involved in informing and co-designing our future arrangements from the beginning. While recognising our differences, it is critical that all our people contribute to shaping the purpose, identity and culture of the new organisation. ▶ Dedicated programme teams and PMO; skills matrix; external support; backfill key roles; and harmonise HR policies.
Legal and contractual issues	Existing contracts may not align with new structures. Existing companies may not align with new structures.	▶ Legal and procurement will conduct a review of contracts and companies across all councils. Decisions will be made on renegotiation / novation strategies and how to incorporate and scale / 'wind up' companies.
Scale and complexity	Local government reorganisation is a significant change in any setting. In addition, we hope to implement devolution through a mayoral strategic authority, elections for which will take place in May 2027. District elections in 2026 will create additional uncertainty in the year before unitary elections. There will be a significant amount of change in a relatively short period of time.	▶ Government to assign Oxfordshire County Council as the continuing authority. Robust governance and programme management will ensure the right skills and capabilities are in place across the current local authorities.
Feeling of county council take over	Continuing authority status can foster a feeling of 'take over' for district councils.	▶ In the early transition phases, engagement with chief executives to agree principles of collaborative working will be vital. This will enable inclusive PMO structures to be built and encourage effective communication and engagement for all employees early and throughout the programme.
Performance, procurement and risk management	There will be a significant amount of work to standardise performance management practices, procurement and contract management capabilities that can deliver the larger scale and complex programme.	▶ Establishing a robust performance management framework linked to a refreshed culture and desired outcomes of One Oxfordshire. ▶ Upgrading procurement and contract management capabilities to suit the larger scale and complexity.

Risk theme	Risk area	Mitigations
Aggregation	While aggregation aims to streamline service delivery and improve efficiency, its implementation introduces several significant challenges such as integration of practice methods; systems and processes; cultural and organisational alignment; governance and representation; service harmonisation; financial reconciliation; and strategic planning and identity.	▶ Aggregation demands strategic oversight, strong leadership, careful planning and robust, experienced change and programme management to overcome the challenges. ▶ This will ensure not only effective change put will safeguard existing services throughout the transition.
Governance and internal control	Reduced governance and weakened internal control frameworks during the transition to Oxfordshire Council may result in increased errors, misstatements, or heightened opportunities for fraud. This risk is particularly acute as legacy processes are replaced, new systems are embedded and roles and responsibilities shift.	▶ Develop and implement a dedicated internal audit plan for the transition, ensuring regular and targeted reviews of key control areas throughout the change process. ▶ Establish a dedicated counter fraud plan to proactively identify, assess and respond to fraud risks, including employees training, enhanced reporting channels and real-time monitoring. ▶ Maintain clear documentation of new processes and controls, with robust oversight from senior leadership and the PMO. ▶ Ensure early engagement with internal audit and counter fraud teams in the design and rollout of new systems and procedures.

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Conclusion

Oxfordshire's story has always been one of ambition and innovation. We now have the chance to write its next chapter – one defined by unity, resilience and shared prosperity. The case for One Oxfordshire is clear and compelling; it is grounded in evidence and driven by ambition. It will enable us not only to reform local government but unlock the full potential of our people and places, setting a new standard for what a county can achieve.

Oxfordshire stands at a pivotal moment: our county's strengths – our world-class universities, thriving innovation clusters and vibrant communities – risk being held back by fragmented governance, rising demand for services, high housing costs and the need for strategic infrastructure.

This proposal sets out a robust, deliverable plan for a single, unified council that will unlock £163 million in net savings by year five, deliver the strongest financial resilience, and protect and enhance the services our residents rely on. It will enable Oxfordshire to plan and invest at scale, drive inclusive economic growth and ensure that every community benefits from a fairer, simpler and more effective system.

One Oxfordshire is not just about structural change; it's about creating the conditions for people and places to thrive. It's about giving communities a stronger voice, protecting our most vulnerable, supporting our businesses, and building a council that is financially resilient and fit for the future.

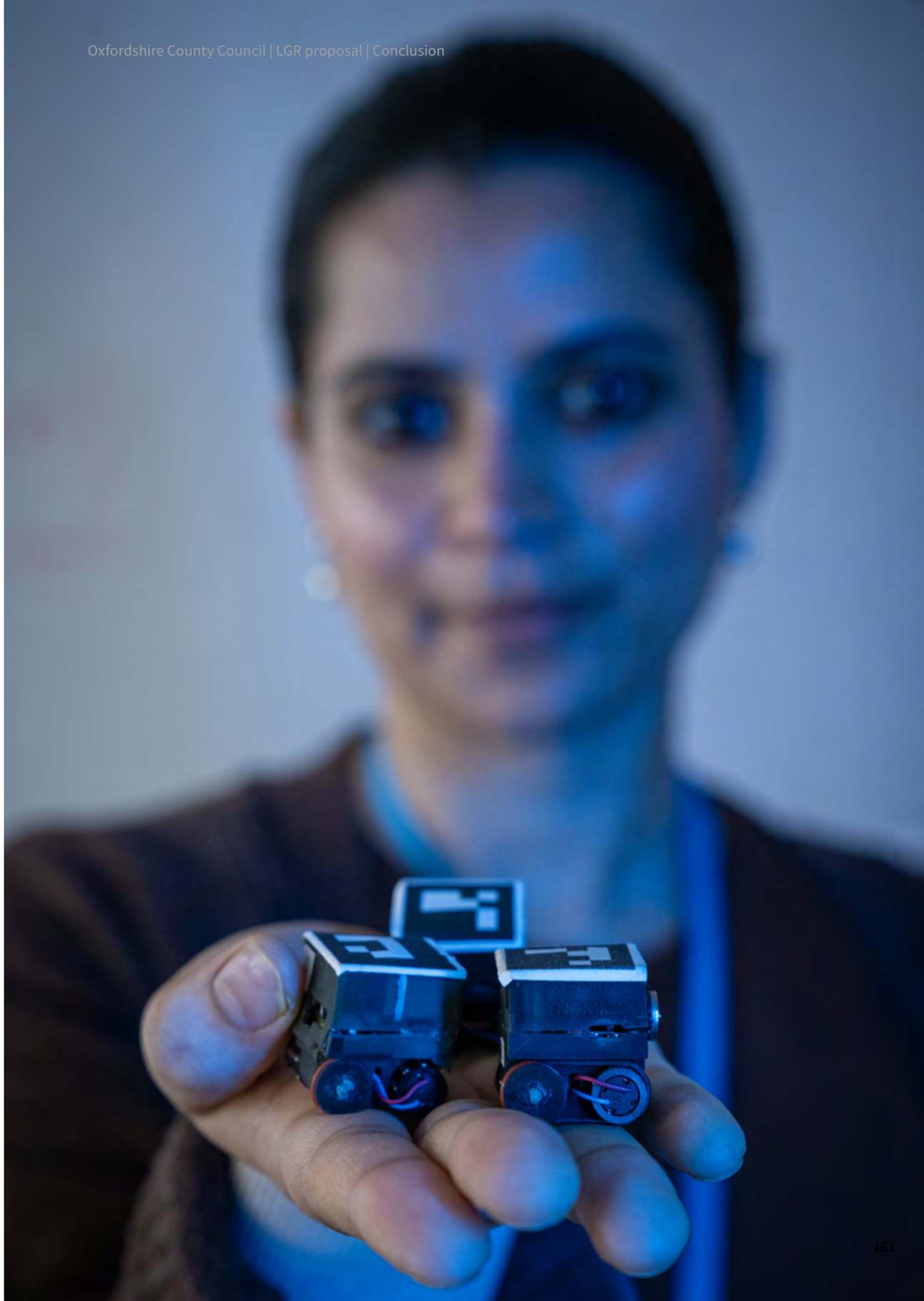
With continuing authority status, we can move to that new future quickly, cost effectively and without unnecessary risk – ready to lead transformation on day one alongside seizing the benefits of devolution through a mayoral strategic authority across the Thames Valley.

One Oxfordshire is a model that meets and exceeds the criteria for reform, delivers value for money and sets a new standard for local government. It will ensure that Oxfordshire remains a beacon of excellence, opportunity and prosperity for generations to come.

Stronger, simpler services.

Let's build one Oxfordshire Council.

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal | Conclusion



Criteria per chapter	Chapter
1 – Covers the whole area concerned	2
1a – A sensible economic area, with appropriate tax basis, which does not create undue advantage or disadvantage for part of the area	2, 3
1b – A sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs	2, 5
1c – Robust evidence and analysis, including estimated costs and benefits	2, 3, 4, 5
1d – Describes single tier structures and how these will achieve outcomes described	5, 6
2 – The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	2, 3
2a – Has a population of 500,000 or more	2
2b – Why a proposal for a population less than 500,000 is appropriate	n/a
2c – Financial efficiencies identified, getting value for money for taxpayer	3
2d – Managing transition costs	3, 7
2e – Councils in best value intervention / exceptional financial support demonstrate reorganisation will put on firmer footing	n/a
2f – Council debt will not be written off as part of reorganisation	3
3 – Prioritising delivery of high quality and sustainable services	3, 4, 5, 6
3a – New structures will improve service delivery, avoiding fragmentation	4, 5, 6, 7
3b – Opportunities to deliver service reform, leading to better value for money	3, 5, 6
3c – Considers impacts for crucial services and wider public services	5
4 – Councils worked together to meet local needs, informed by local views	4, 5
4a – Local meaningful and constructive engagement undertaken	4

Oxfordshire County Council | LGR proposal |

Criteria per chapter	Chapter
4b – Considers issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance	2
4c – Evidence of local engagement, explanation of views and how concerns will be addressed	4
5 – New unitary structures support devolution arrangements	6, 7
5a – Supported by existing CA/CCA/mayor	n/a
5b – How devolution will be unlocked	6, 7
5c – Sensible population size ratios between local and strategic authorities and LGR and devolution have compatible timelines	6, 7
6 – New structures enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	6
6a – Plans to engage communities	6
6b – Arrangements in place will enable strong community engagement	6
Boundary changes a – existing district areas used as building blocks	2
Boundary changes b – financial justification for changes in boundaries	n/a
Engagement a – collaborative working and info sharing across area local leaders	3, 4
Engagement b – commissioners appointed for Best Value Intervention input	n/a
Engagement c – stakeholders including members, residents, workforce and businesses engaged	4, 7
Engagement d – engagement informs proposals and builds shared understanding of improvements to delivery	4
Engagement e – views integrated from ICB, police, fire and rescue, local higher education and voluntary and third sector	4
Engagement f – forms a separate process from devolution	6

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3. Office for National Statistics – UK business; activity, size and location: 2024 (25 September 2024)
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5. Department for Transport – Road traffic statistics – Local authority: Oxfordshire (2000 – 2024)
6. Appendix 1 – LGR data pack: Major infrastructure in Oxfordshire: Road, rail and settlements, figure 2
7. Oxfordshire County Council – Oxfordshire Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (January 2025)
8. Appendix 1 – Areas susceptible to risk of flooding across Oxfordshire, figure 3
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26. Oxfordshire County Council (n.d.) – The Marmot Place Programme (Retrieved 23 September 2025)
27. EHH – England's Economic Heartland Alliance
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30. OxLEP (now Enterprise Oxfordshire) – Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan, page 8 (December 2023)
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32. Office for National Statistics – Regional gross domestic product: local authorities (April 2025). Appendix 1 – LGR data pack: Gross Value Add (GVA) Oxfordshire and UK local authority mean average, figure 12 (1998 – 2023)
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37. OxLEP (now Enterprise Oxfordshire) – Invest in Oxfordshire: The UK's science & technology superpower, page 4 (2024)

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Appendix 2

Metro Dynamics - Thames Valley Devolution Report

Appendix 3

One Oxfordshire financial case and options appraisal (2025)

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Key findings from the four strands of resident engagement (summer 2025)

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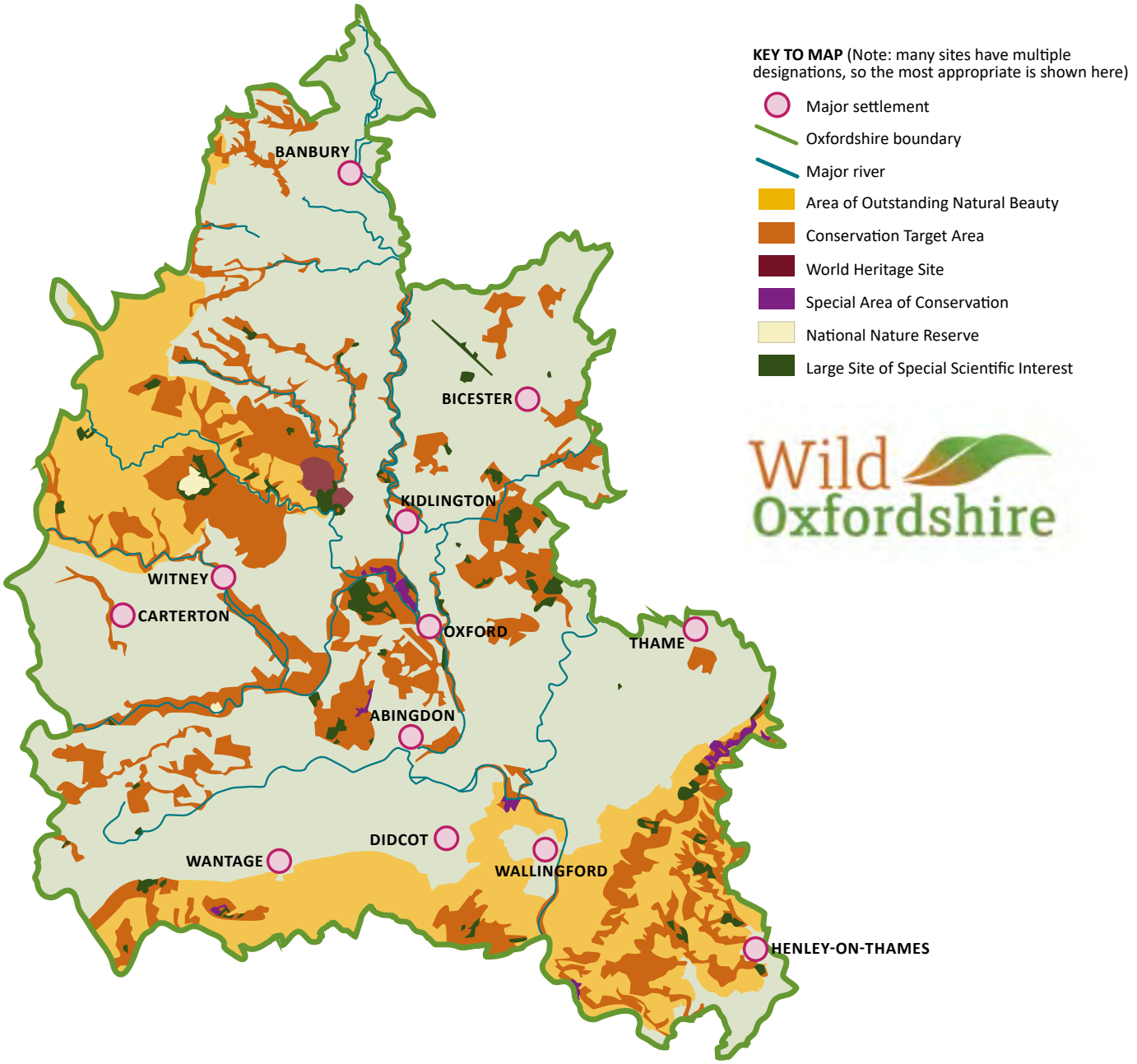
Geography and population

Figure 1: Areas of strategic value to nature in Oxfordshire



Source: Wild Oxfordshire, State of Nature in Oxfordshire (April 2017)
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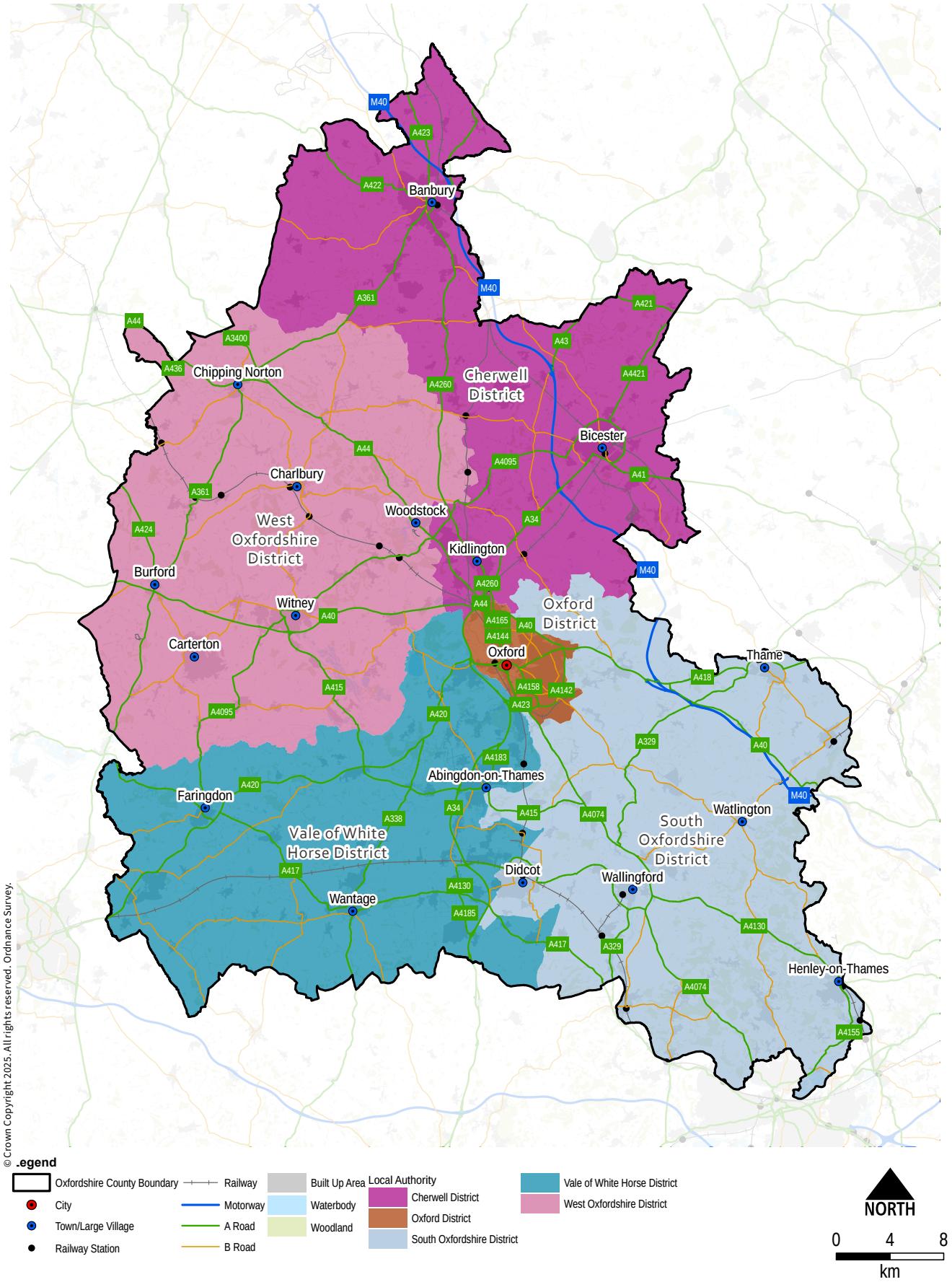
Figure 2: Major infrastructure in Oxfordshire: Road, rail and settlements



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Source: AECOM, Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) stage 1 baseline report page 15 (August 2025)
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Figure 3: Areas susceptible to risk of flooding across Oxfordshire

Source: AECOM for Oxfordshire Joint Leaders Committee, Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) stage 1 baseline report page 122 (August 2025)

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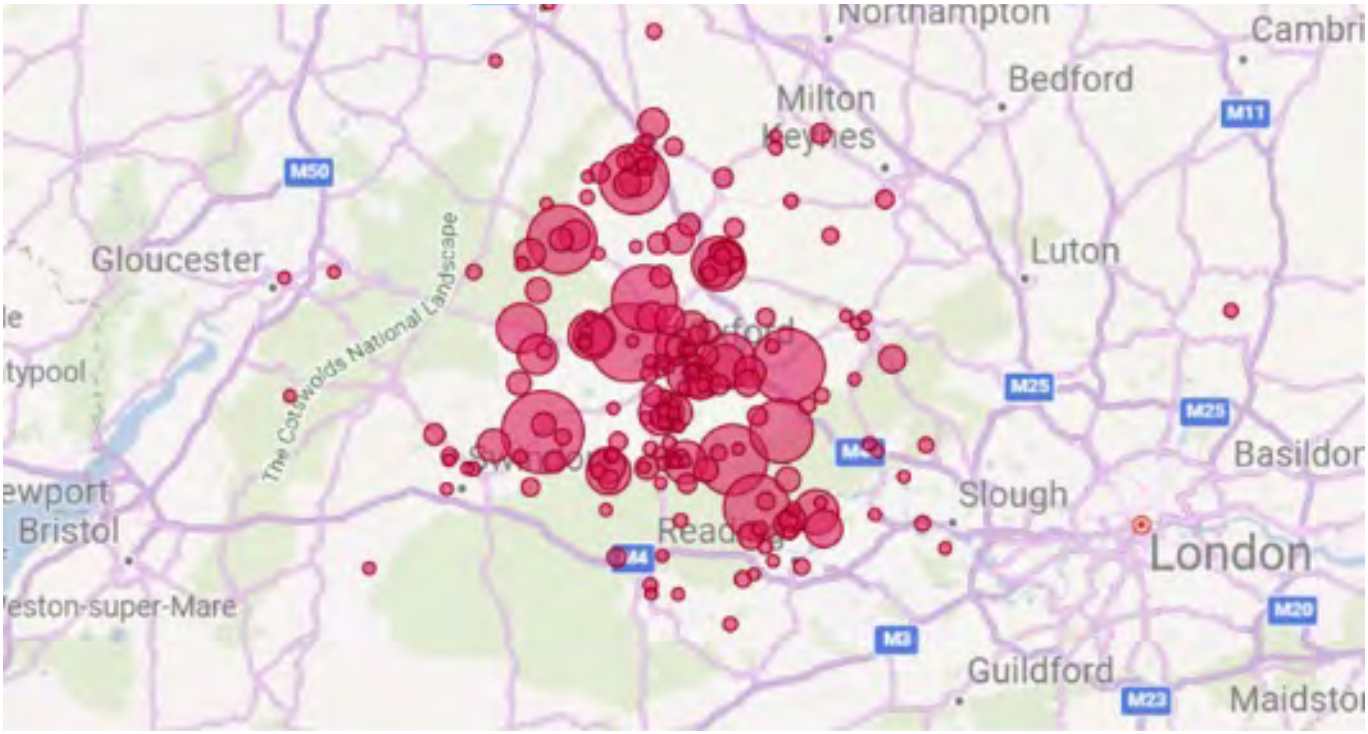
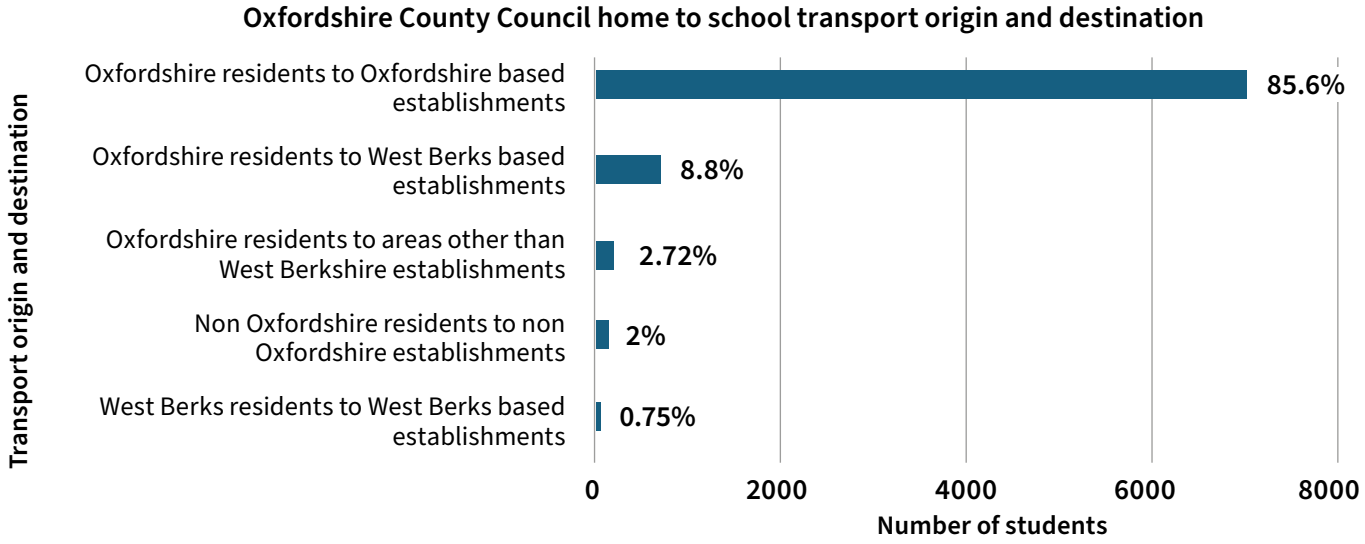
Historic identity and opportunity

Figure 4: Home to school transport destinations through supported transport services travel assistance



Source: Oxfordshire County Council

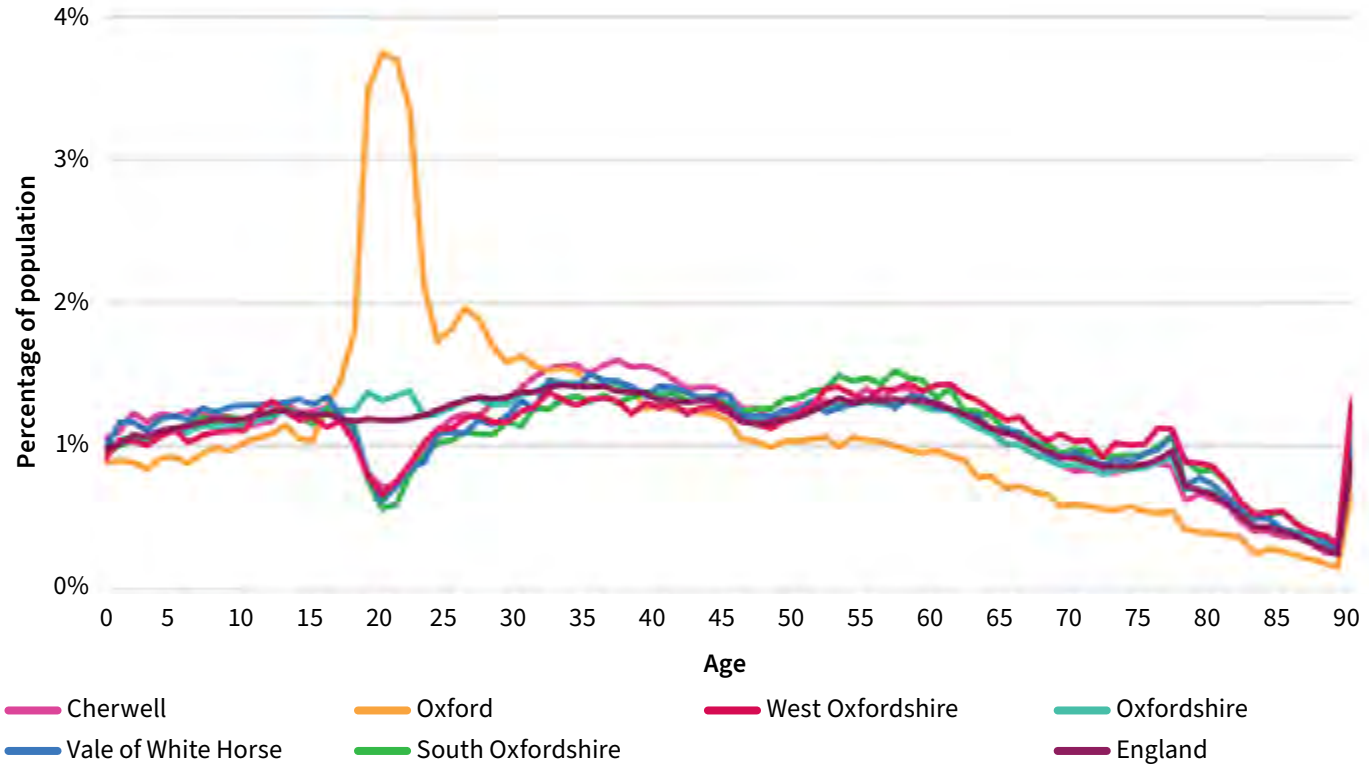
Figure 5: Home to school transport: Origin and destination (%) through supported transport services travel assistance



Source: Oxfordshire County Council

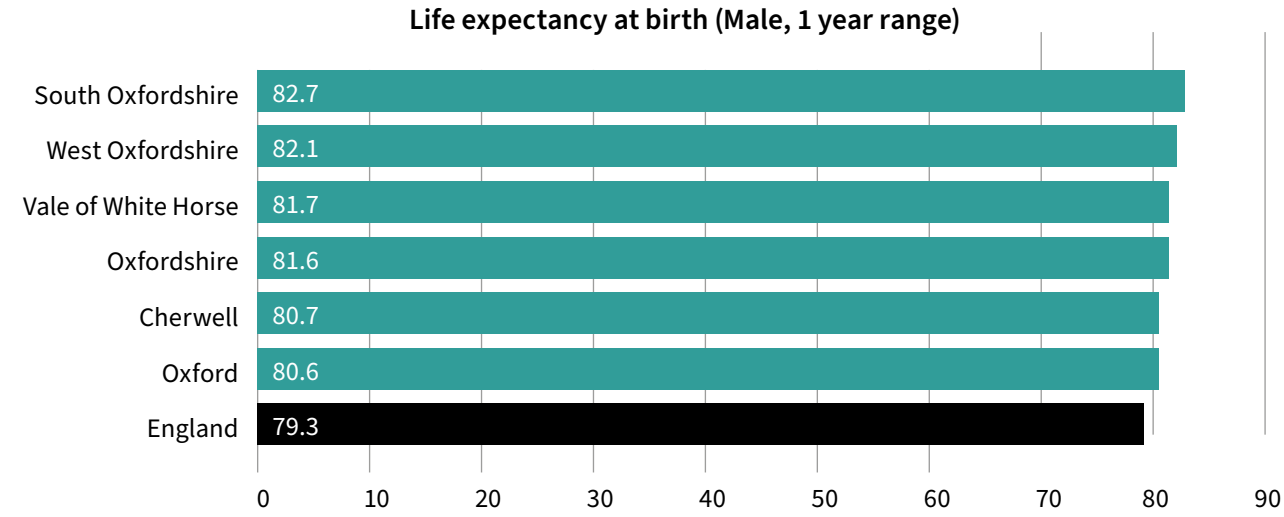
Age profiles

Figure 6: Percentage of population by age. 0 to 90 years and 90+ years



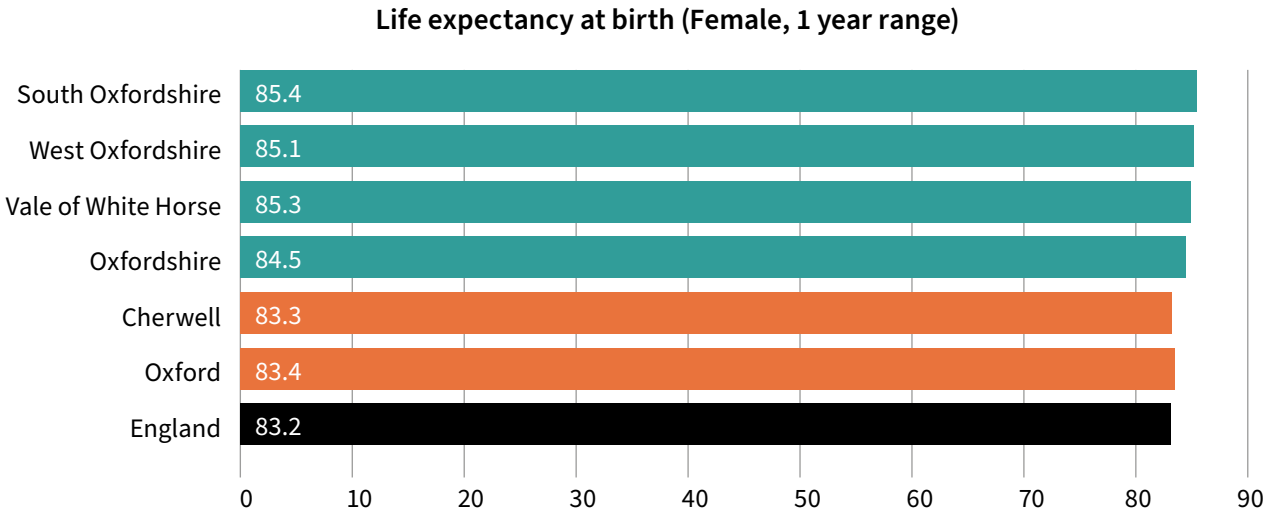
Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2024 (released 30 July 2025)

Figure 7: Average male life expectancy at birth in Oxfordshire, district council areas and England (2023)



Source: Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care

Figure 8: Average female life expectancy at birth in Oxfordshire, district council areas and England (2023)



Source: Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care

Ethnicity

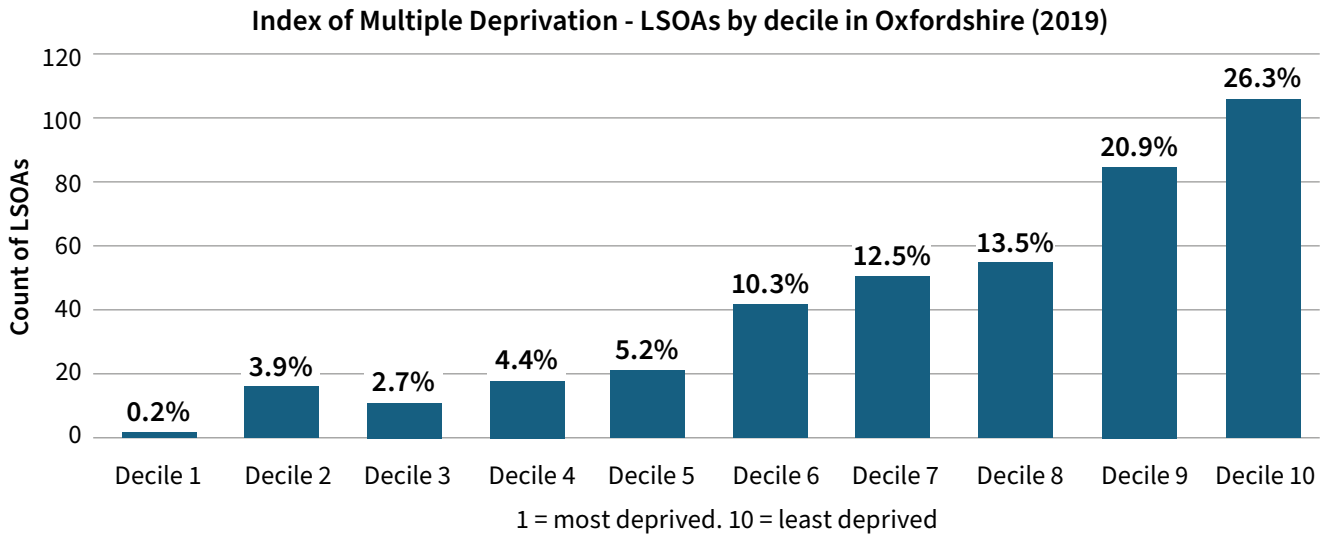
Figure 9: Ethnicity: Oxfordshire and district council areas (2021)

Council	Asian	Black	Mixed or multiple	Other	White
Oxfordshire	6%	2%	3%	2%	87%
Cherwell	6%	2%	3%	1%	88%
Oxford	15%	5%	6%	4%	71%
South Oxfordshire	3%	1%	2%	1%	93%
Vale of White Horse	4%	2%	3%	1%	91%
West Oxfordshire	2%	1%	2%	1%	95%

Source: ONS, Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021, TS021 - Ethnic group - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics (November 2022)

Deprivation

Figure 10: Index of Multiple Deprivation: Oxfordshire LSOA* deciles



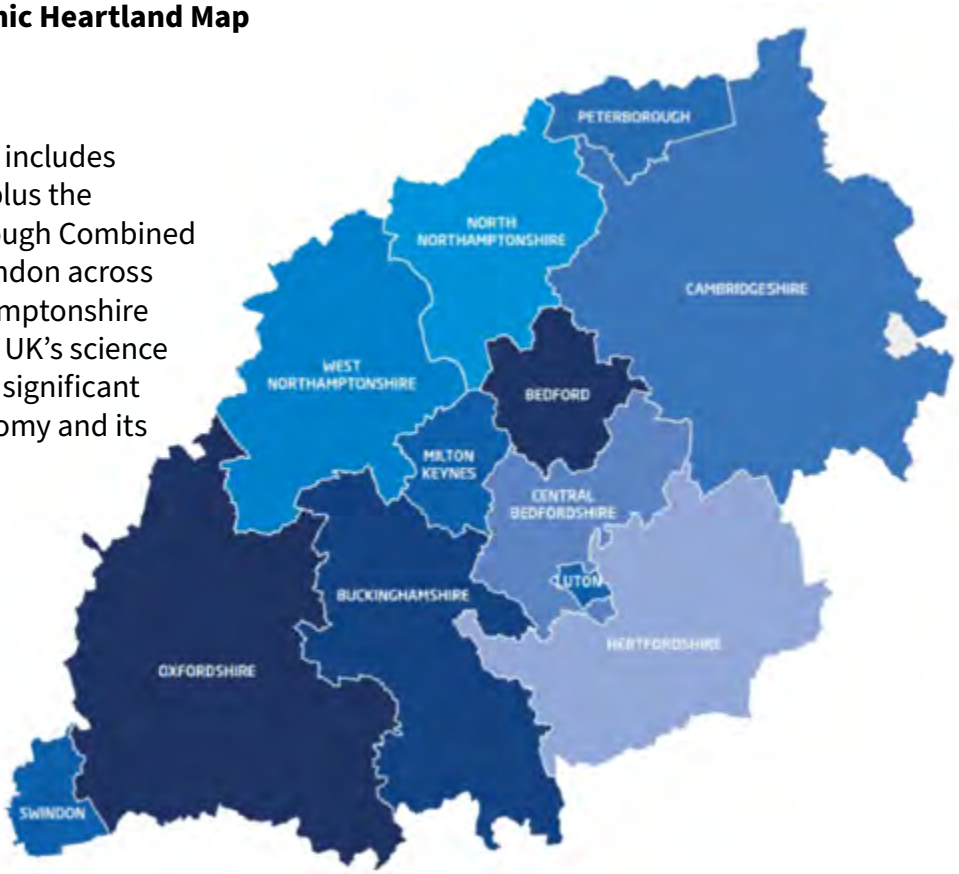
Source: MHCLG (Through Oxfordshire data hub: Deprivation Report for Oxfordshire Deprivation - UTLA | Oxfordshire | Report Builder for ArcGIS) (September 2019)

* LSOA - Lower layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are made up of groups of Output Areas (OAs), usually four or five. They comprise between 400 and 1,200 households and have a usually resident population between 1,000 and 3,000 persons.

Regional partnerships

Figure 11: England's Economic Heartland Map

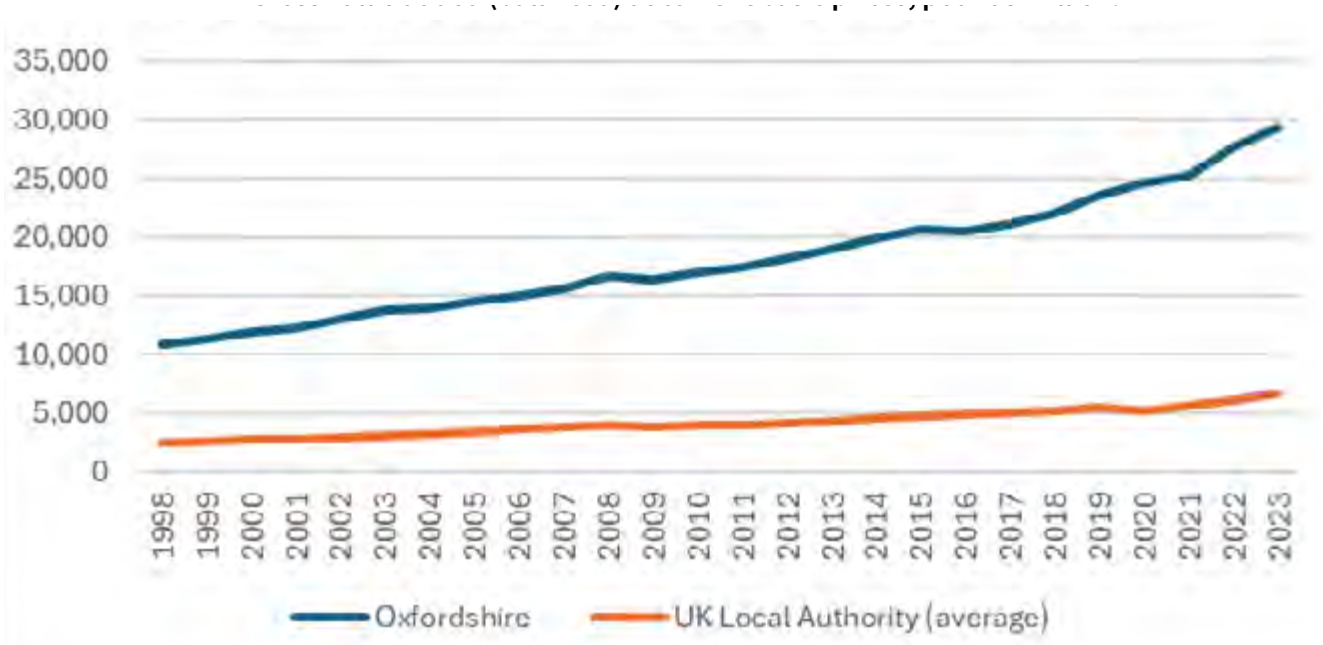
England's Economic Heartland includes 12 local transport authorities plus the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. Stretching from Swindon across to Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire down to Hertfordshire, it is the UK's science and technology superpower: a significant contributor to the British economy and its rebutation around the world.



Source: EEH Annual Report 2024/25, https://englandseconomicheartland.com/publications-and-papers/publications (July 2025)

Labour market and employment

Figure 12: Gross Value Add (GVA) Oxfordshire* and UK local authority mean average (1998-2023)**

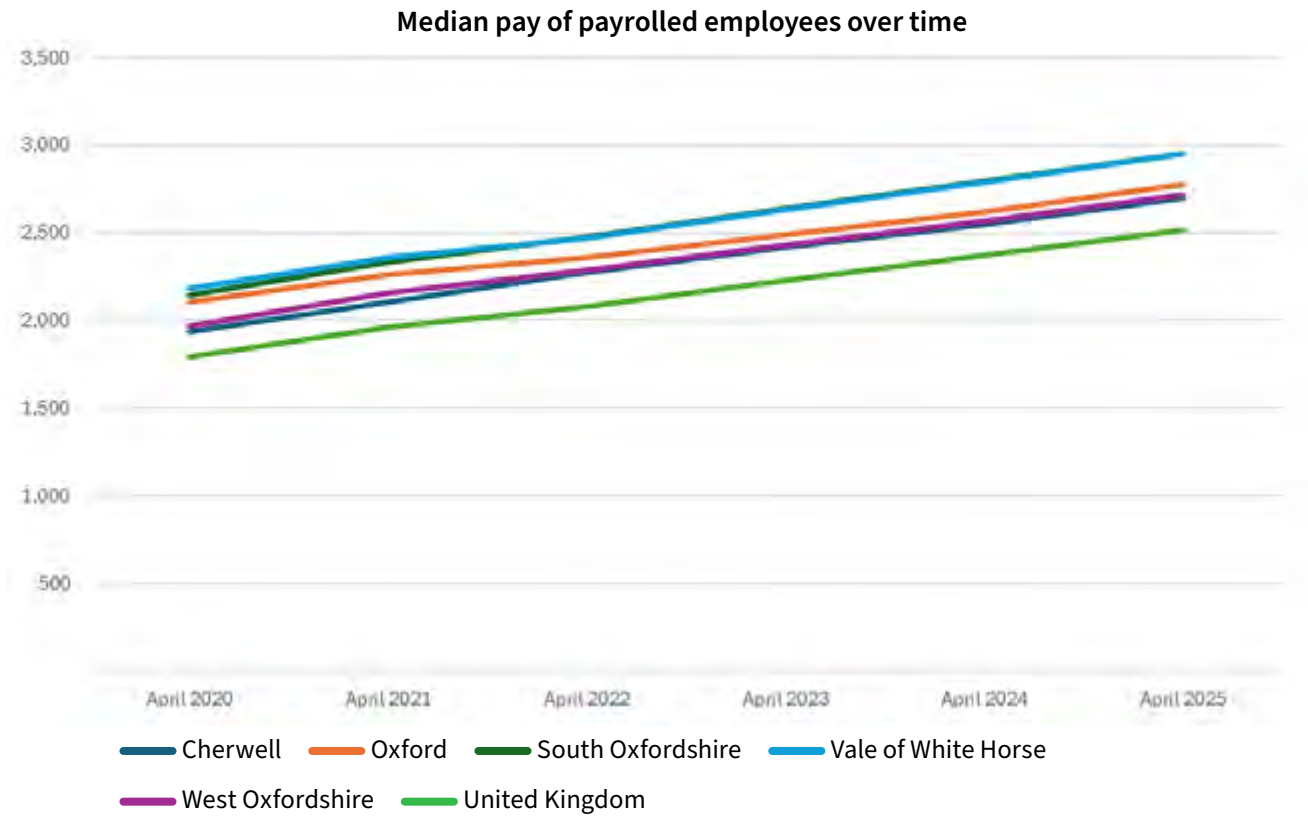


Source: ONS, Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics (April 2025)

*Oxfordshire is a composite total of its five county districts (Cherwell, Oxford, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire)

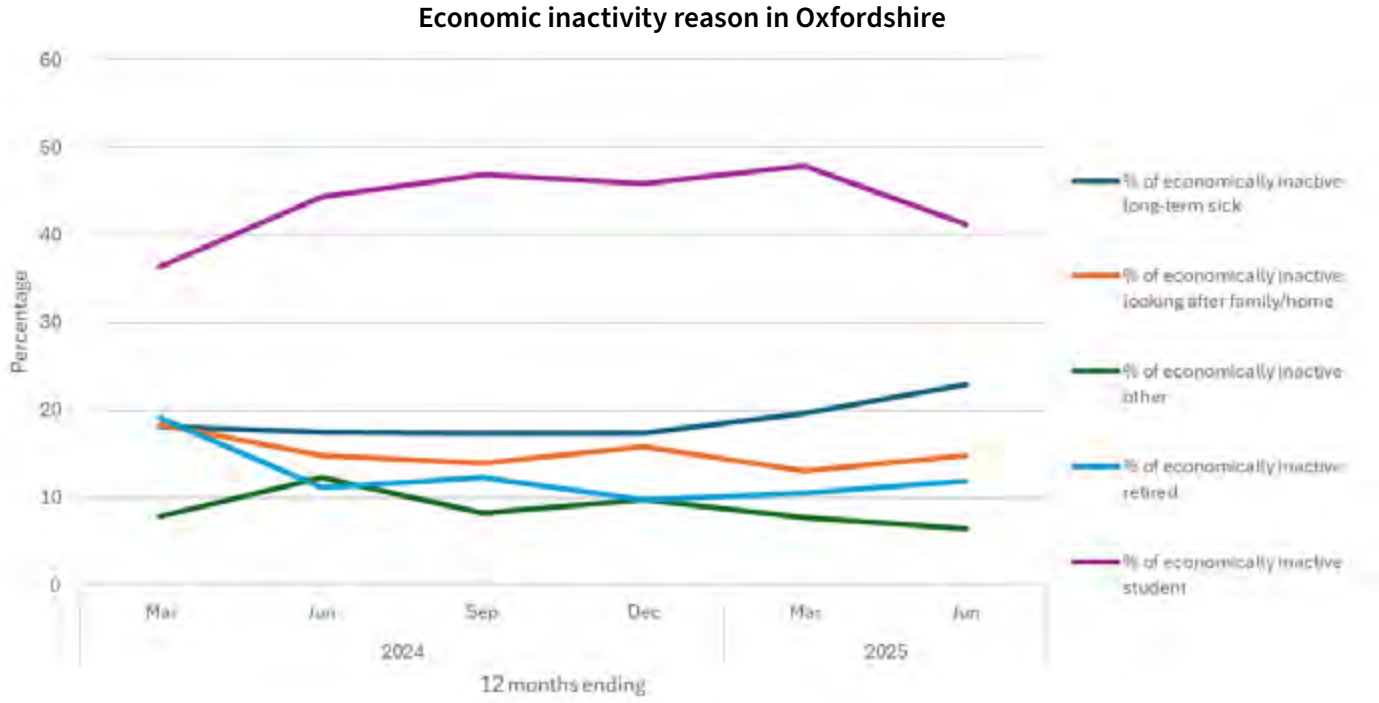
**Local authority average comprising the mean average of local authority districts, London boroughs, unitary authorities and Scottish Council areas.

Figure 13: Median pay of payrolled employees, Oxfordshire districts and UK average (2020-2025)



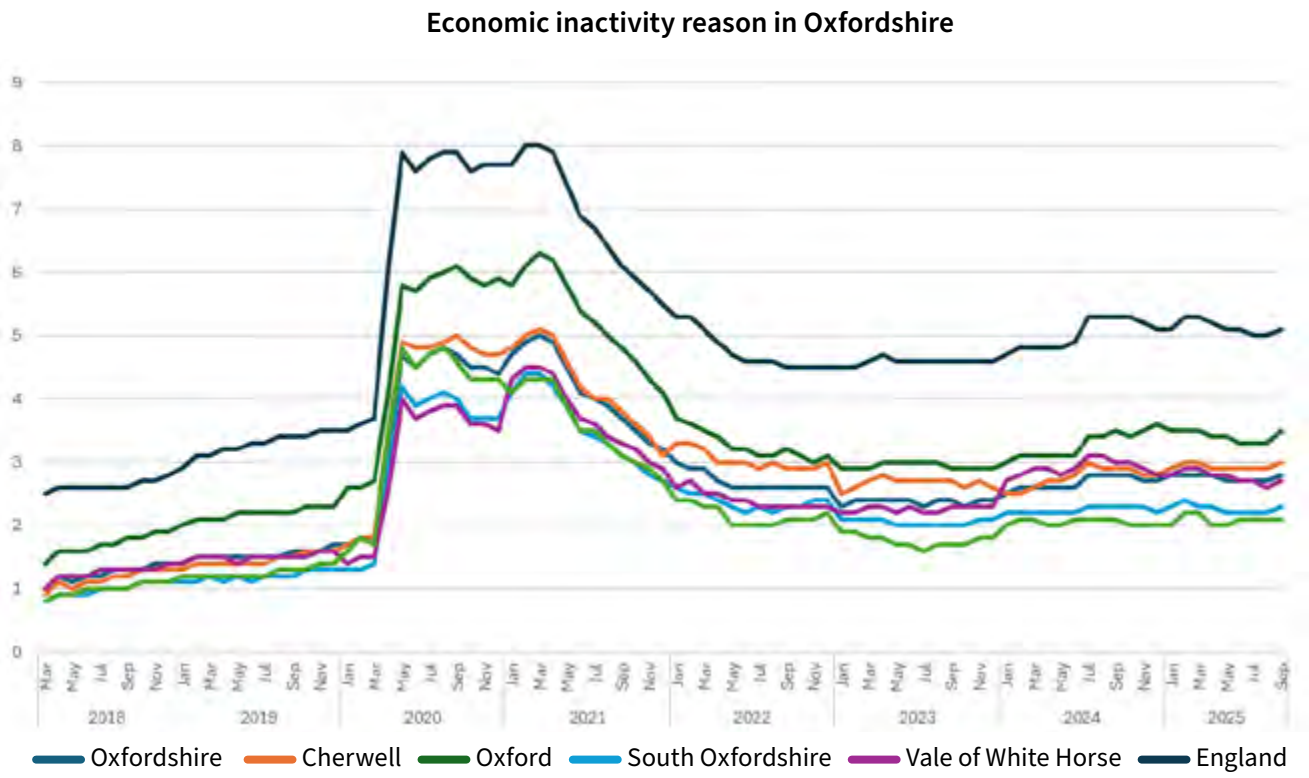
Source: ONS, Local Administrative Unit, Average monthly pay ONS (August 2025)

Figure 14: Economic inactivity rate in Oxfordshire and district council areas (2024/25)



Source: ONS, Economic inactivity - Office for National Statistics (annual population survey)

Figure 15: Unemployment rate: Oxfordshire and district council areas (2018–2025)



Source: ONS, Labour market overview, UK - Office for National Statistics – (table Claimant count by sex and age) (September 2025)

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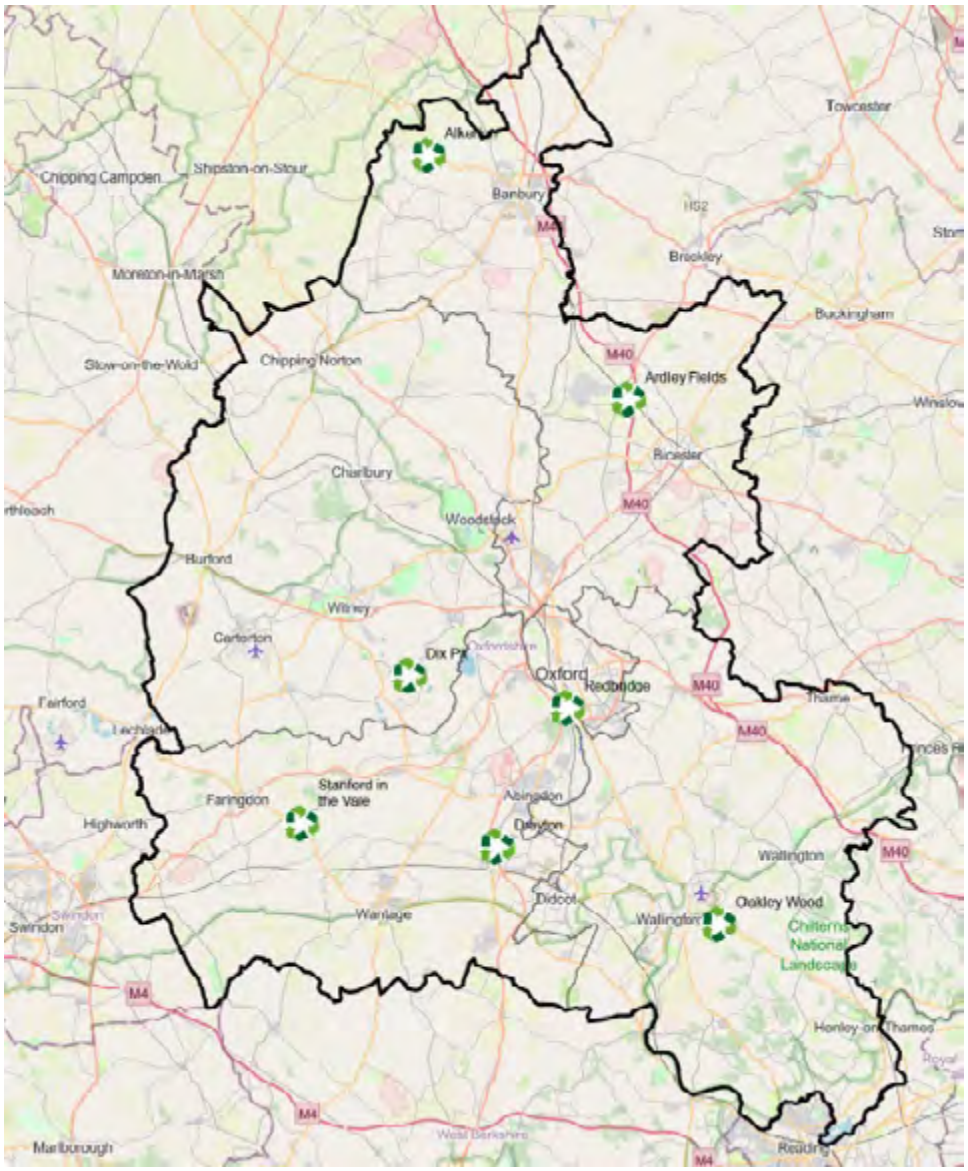
Waste management

Figure 16: Location of waste recycling centres in Oxfordshire



Source: Oxfordshire County Council

Additional data

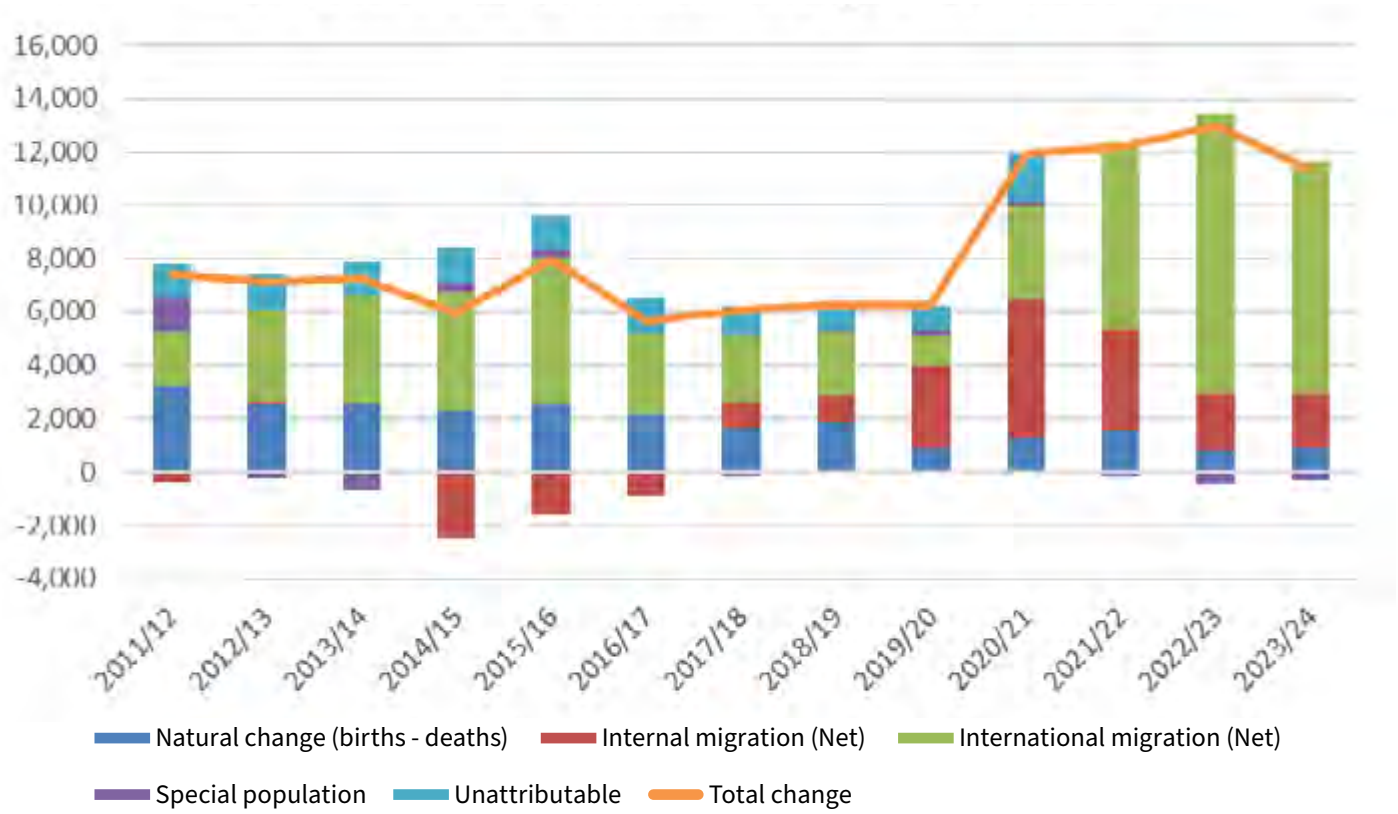
Population

Figure A: Age distribution, Oxfordshire and district council areas

Council	Children (under 16)		Working age (16-64)		Older People (65+)	
	People	%	People	%	People	%
Oxfordshire	137,489	18%	485,730	64%	139,999	18%
Cherwell	32,523	19%	107,694	63%	30,209	18%
Oxford	25,745	16%	120,279	72%	20,010	12%
South Oxfordshire	28,539	18%	94,907	61%	33,024	21%
Vale of White Horse	29,203	20%	90,363	61%	29,781	20%
West Oxfordshire	21,479	18%	72,487	60%	26,975	22%

Source: ONS, Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2024 (table Estimates of the population for England and Wales) (July 2025)

Figure B: Components of population change in Oxfordshire



Source: ONS, Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2024 (Analysis of population estimates tool for UK) (July 2025)

Geography

Figure C: Population density, Oxfordshire and district council areas

Name	Area (sq. km)	People per sq. km
Oxfordshire	2,605	293
Cherwell	589	289
Oxford	46	3,641
South Oxfordshire	679	231
Vale of White Horse	578	259
West Oxfordshire	714	169

Source: ONS, Population estimates for England and Wales: mid-2024 (table Estimates of the population for England and Wales) (July 2025)

Housing

Figure D: Number of households, Oxfordshire and district council areas

Council	Households			Communal establishment	
	People	Households	Average persons	People	% of population
Oxfordshire	694,120	288,109	2.41	31,171	4.3%
Cherwell	158,826	65,893	2.41	2,190	1.4%
Oxford	140,818	55,239	2.55	21,222	13.1%
South Oxfordshire	146,743	61,497	2.39	2,342	1.6%
Vale of White Horse	135,950	57,498	2.36	2,963	2.1%
West Oxfordshire	111,783	47,981	2.33	2,454	2.1%

Source: ONS, Household and resident characteristics, England and Wales: Census 2021 (table TS001) (November 2022)

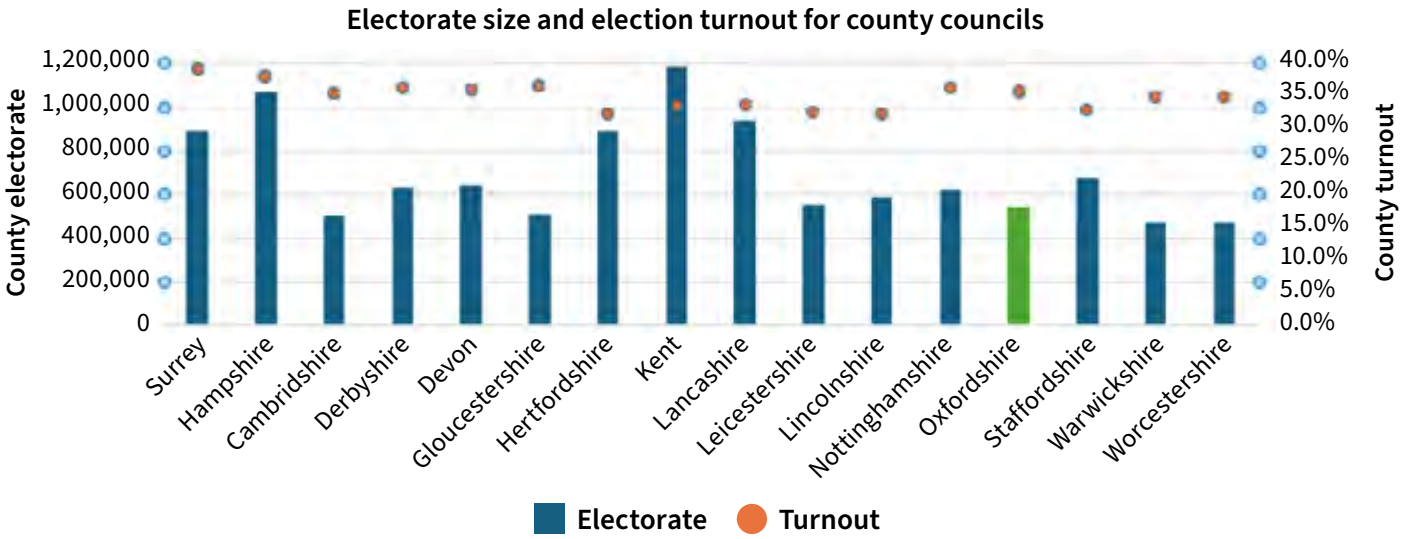
Figure E: Housing tenure type (%), Oxfordshire and district council areas

Council	Owned		Shared ownership	Social rented		Private rented		Lives rent free
	Owns outright	Owns with a mortgage or loan		Rents from council or Local Authority	Other social rented	Private landlord or letting agency	Other private rented	
Oxfordshire	33.8	29.5	1.8	4.2	10.5	17	3.1	0.1
Cherwell	32.5	32.5	1.9	2.2	11.1	17.4	2.4	0
Oxford	25.3	20	1.4	13.4	7.5	29.2	2.9	0.2
South Oxfordshire	37.7	32.5	1.8	1.8	10.2	12.9	3	0
Vale of White Horse	36.2	32	1.8	2.2	12.1	12.2	3.5	0
West Oxfordshire	37.4	29.3	2.1	1.6	11.6	13.7	4.1	0

Source: ONS, Housing, England and Wales: Census 2021 (table TS054) (January 2023)

Democracy

Figure F: Electorate size and turnout for county council elections, 2025



Source: The Electoral Commission (July 2025)

Economy

Figure G: VAT/PAYE enterprise size by employment, Oxfordshire and district council areas

	Employment Size Band							
	0-4	**5-9**	**10-19**	**20-49**	**50-99**	**100-249**	**250+**	**Total**
Oxfordshire	24,330	3,635	1,955	1,115	345	210	165	**31,755**
Cherwell	5,505	790	430	240	75	50	35	**7,125**
Oxford	3,480	610	370	230	85	65	45	**4,885**
South Oxfordshire	6,275	885	420	220	70	30	25	**7,925**
Vale of White Horse	4,550	630	380	225	75	40	40	**5,940**
West Oxfordshire	4,520	720	355	200	40	25	20	**5,880**

Source: ONS, UK business; activity, size and location - Office for National Statistics, (September 2024)

Figure H: VAT/PAYE enterprise size by turnover, Oxfordshire and district council areas

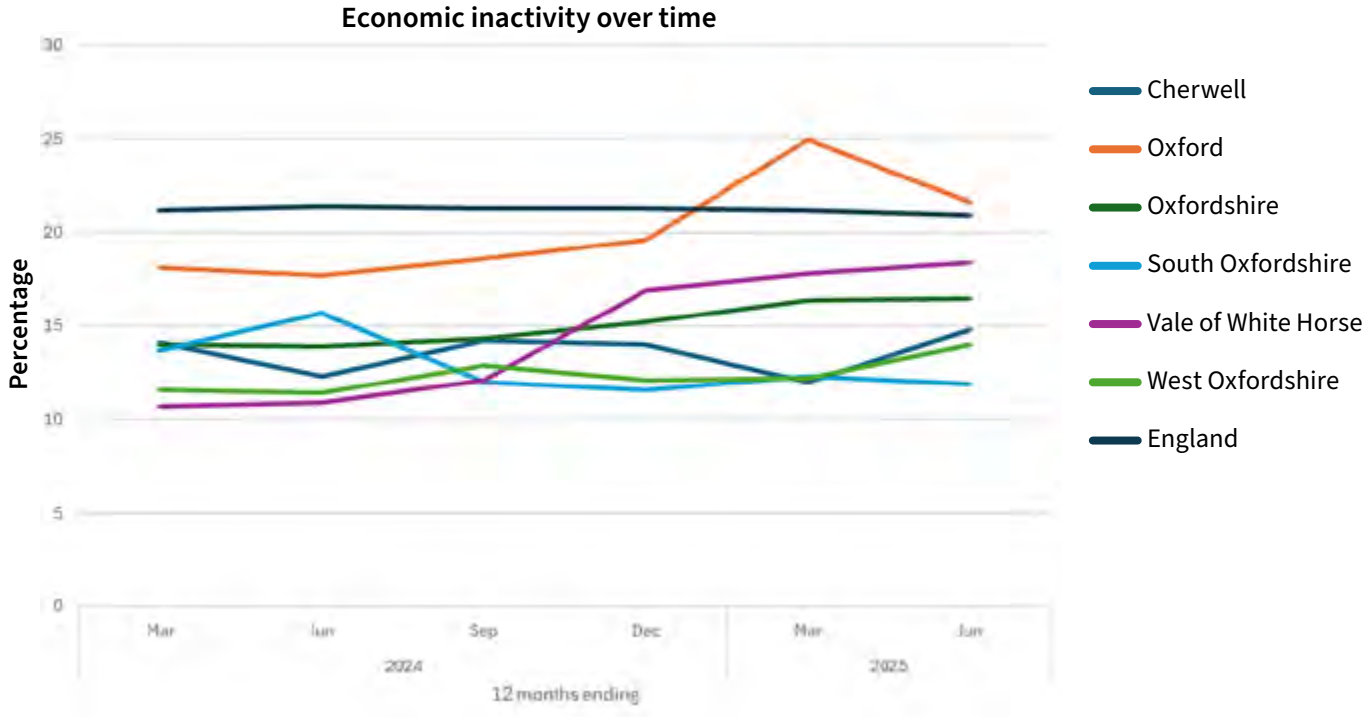
Number of VAT and/or PAYE based enterprises in districts, counties and unitary authorities within region and country by turnover sizebands (£000's)

Units: Counts (control rounded to base 5)

	Turnover Size Band (£000's)										
	0-49	50-99	100-249	250-499	500-999	1000-1999	2000-4999	5000-9999	10000-49999	50000+	Total
Oxfordshire	4,660	5,940	10,075	4,580	2,800	1,620	1,095	425	425	135	**31,755**
Cherwell	1,090	1,400	2,225	940	625	355	230	105	120	35	**7,125**
Oxford	665	875	1,445	765	510	265	180	80	70	30	**4,885**
South Oxfordshire	1,115	1,455	2,675	1,200	655	380	250	85	85	25	**7,925**
Vale of White Horse	900	1,125	1,900	820	470	285	230	80	100	30	**5,940**
West Oxfordshire	890	1,085	1,830	855	540	335	205	75	50	15	**5,880**

Source: ONS, UK business; activity, size and location - Office for National Statistics (September 2024)

Figure I: Economic inactivity rate, Oxfordshire, district council areas and England average (2024/25)

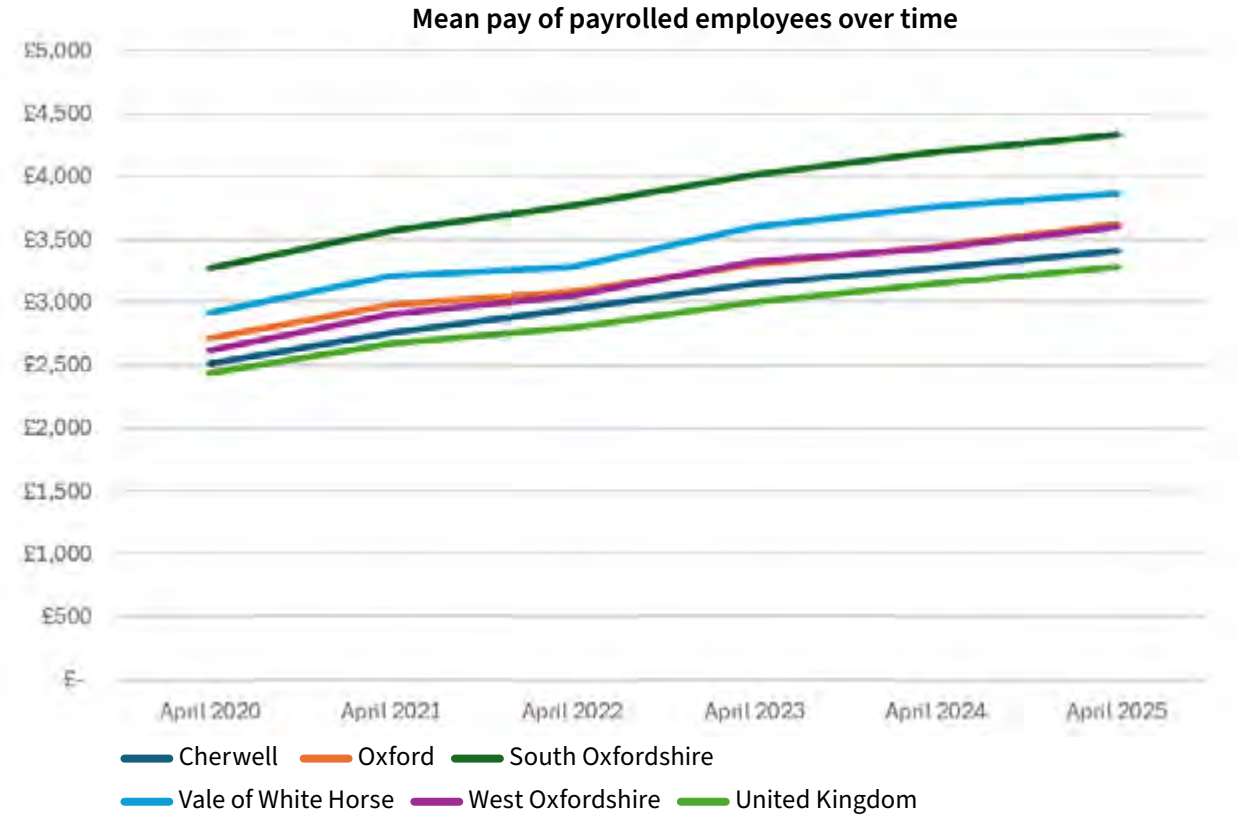


Source: ONS, Economic inactivity - Office for National Statistics (annual population survey)

Figure J: Self-employment of those aged 16-64 (%), Oxfordshire, district council areas and England average (2024/25)

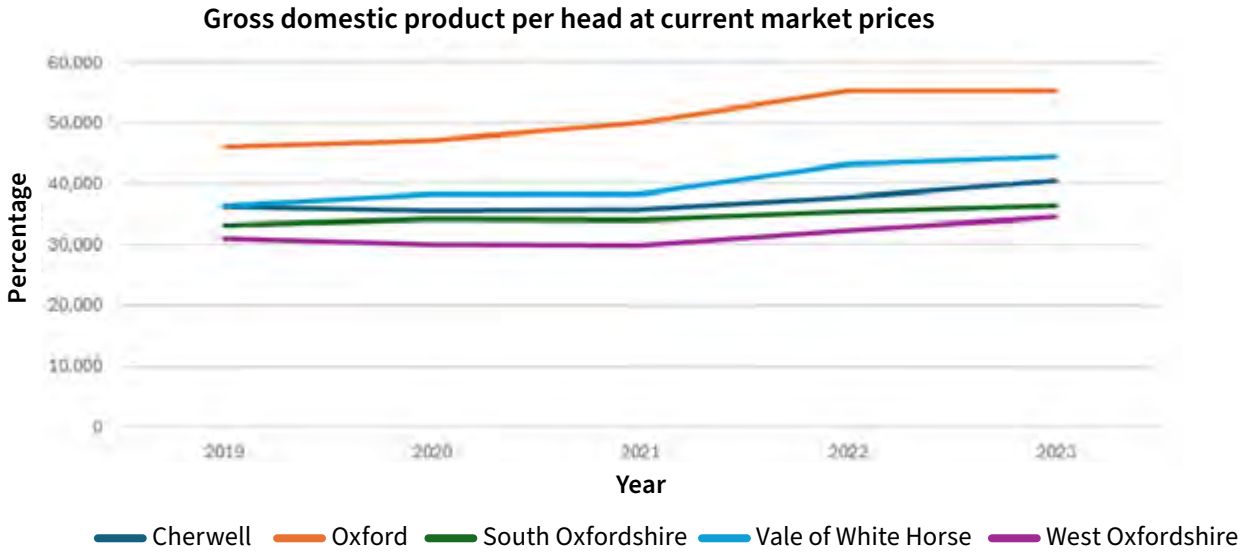
Source: ONS, annual population survey

Figure K: Average monthly pay of payrolled employees, Oxfordshire, district council areas and UK average (2020-2025)



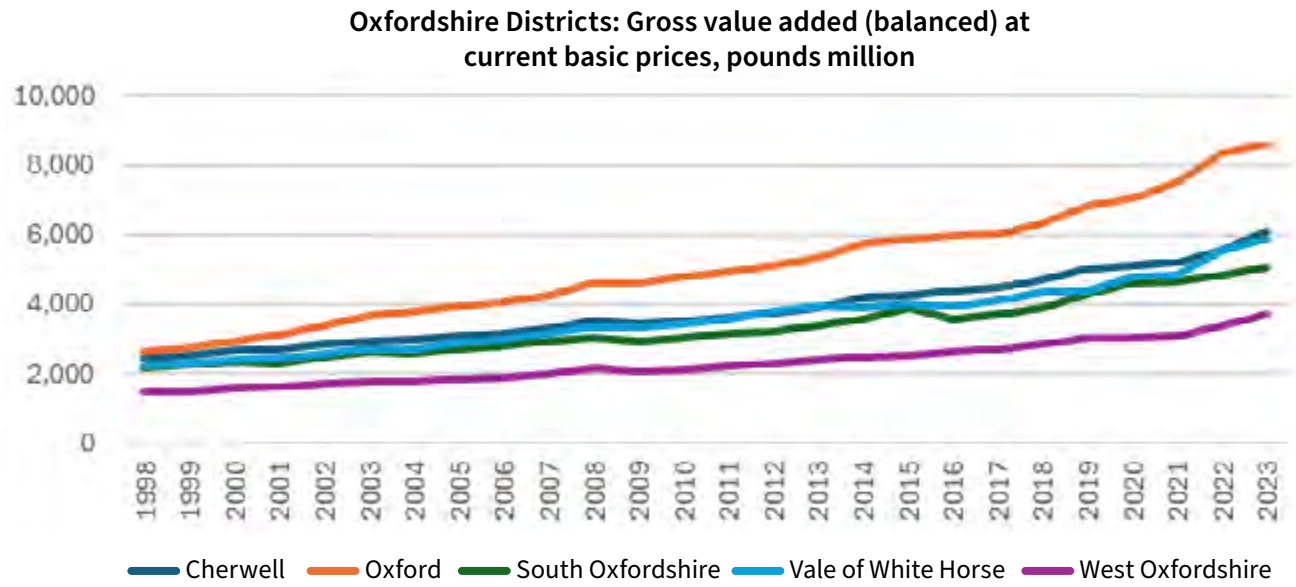
Source: ONS, Local Administrative Unit, Average monthly pay (August 2025)

Figure L: Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Oxfordshire district council areas (2019-2023)



Source: ONS, Regional gross domestic product: local authorities (April 2025)

Figure M: Gross Value Add (GVA), Oxfordshire district council areas (1998-2023)



Source: ONS, Regional gross domestic product: local authorities - Office for National Statistics (April 2025)

Figure N: Employment in Oxfordshire's Local Industrial Strategy Sectors (2018)

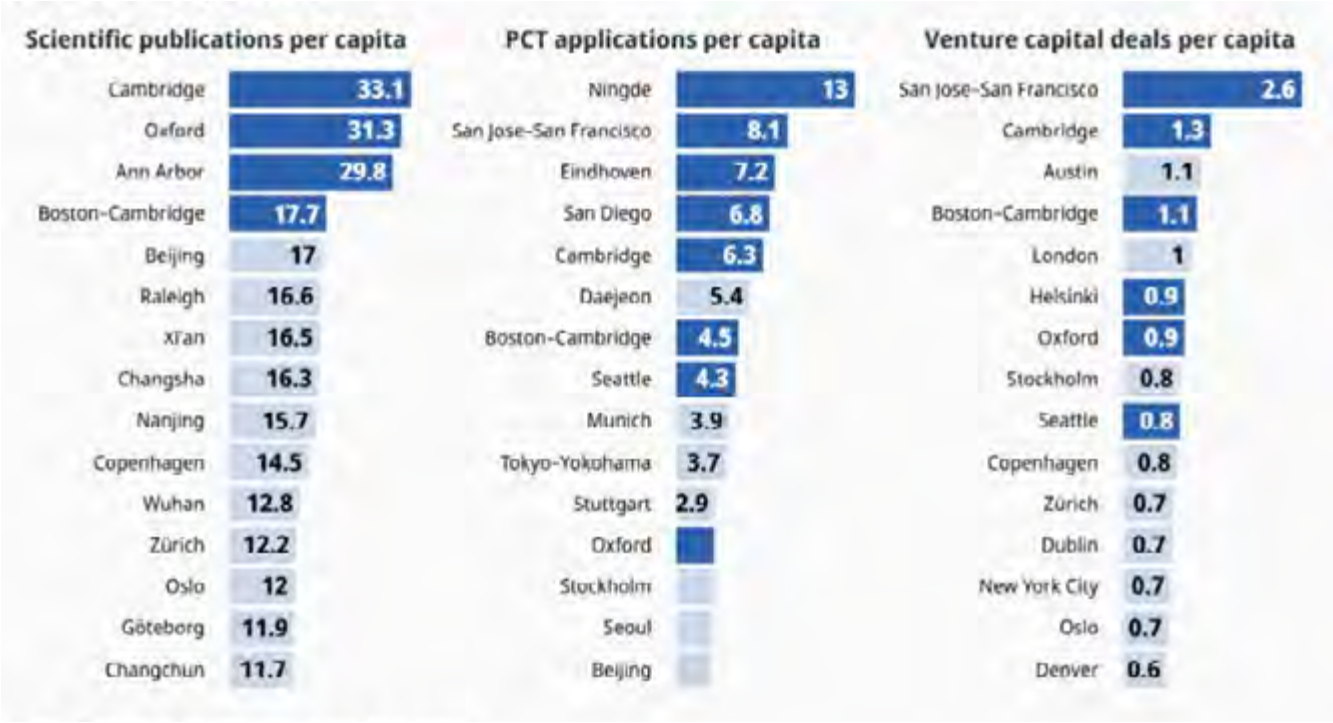
Employment (jobs) in LIS sectors within Oxfordshire, 2018

	Employee jobs [53] 2018	% of total Oxfordshire employee jobs	Employee jobs growth, 2009-2018	Employee jobs % growth, 2009-2018	Location quotient (LQ). 2018	aGVA[54] (2016, £m), 2018
Robotics and autonomous systems	17,050	4.7%	5,600	48.9%	3.1	£1,000
Life sciences and digital health	11,700	3.2%	5,900	101.7%	1.5	£245
Space-led data applications	825	0.2%	695	534.6%	0.6	£27
Quantum computing	8,095	2.2%	1,685	26.3%	4.4	£251
Automotive and motorsport	10,125	2.8%	1,855	22.4%	1.5	£635
Creative and digital	26,420	7.2%	2,370	9.9%	1.2	£1,822
Energy	3,700	1.0%	660	21.7%	0.9	£321
Total 'breakthrough sectors'[55]	60,070	16.5%	12,860	27.2%	1.4	£3,305
Total 'cornerstone sectors'	304,485	83.5%	35,360	13.1%	0.9	-
Total Oxfordshire economy	**364,555**	-	**48,220**	**15.2%**	-	-

Source: Oxfordshire Growth Board, Microsoft Word - Final Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment Phase 1 Report 24.06.21 page 99 (June 2024)

Figure O: Global Innovation Index innovation intensive cluster metrics, per capita (2025)

Top 15 innovation intensive clusters, by metric per capita (in thousands), 2025



Note: Dark blue represents a top 10 cluster

Source: WIPO Statistics Database, Global Innovation Index 2025 - Cluster ranking (May 2025)

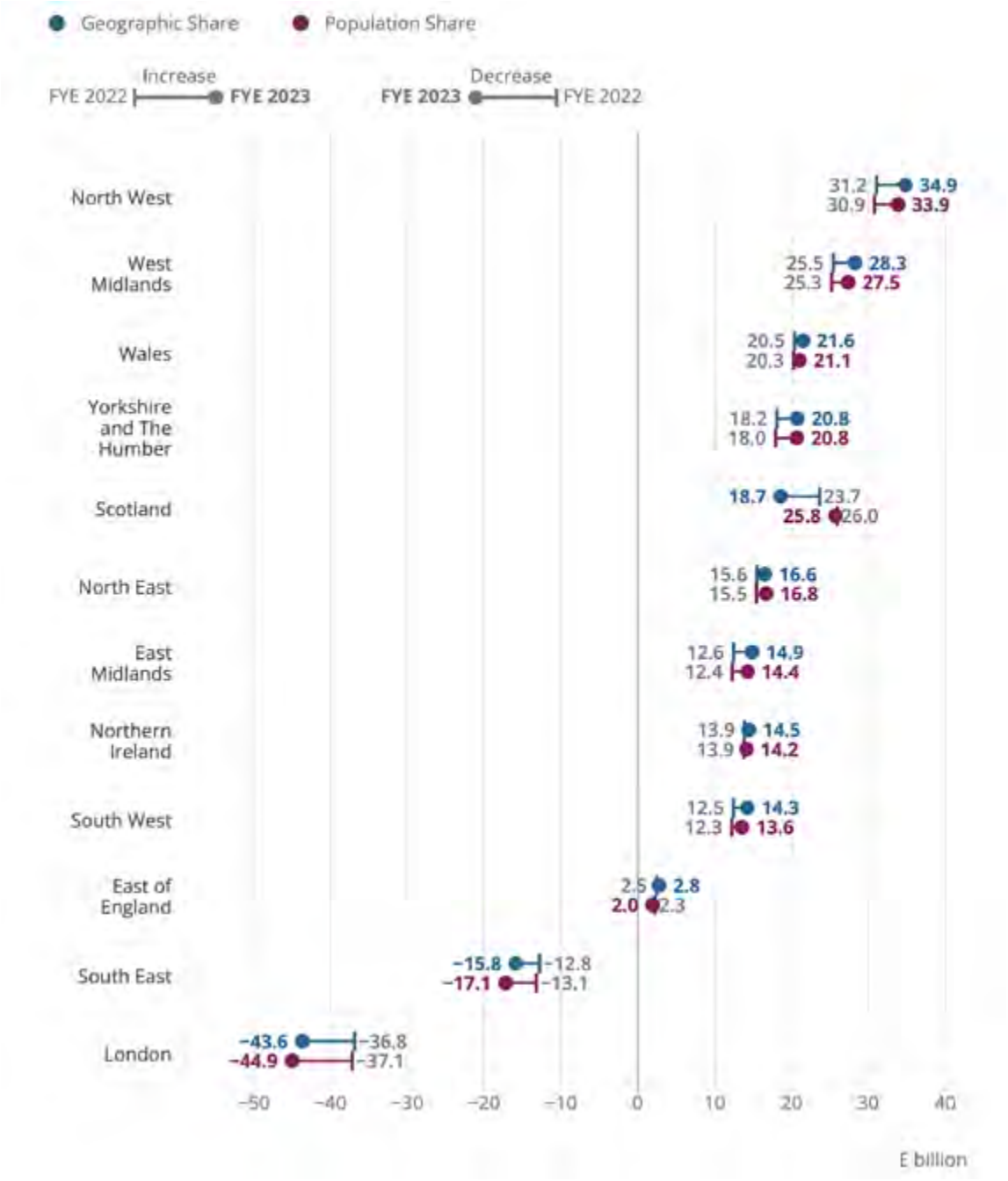
Figure P: Businesses in Oxfordshire showing growth signals*

Source: OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan 2023 (Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan) page 19 (December 2023)

*'Growth Signals' have been identified through a web-crawl of Oxfordshire businesses, with a business tagged when its company website refers to one of: new offices, funding, collaborations, product launches and hiring. Some 6,129 out of 18,240 Oxfordshire-based businesses with a web presence were identified as having a 'growth signal'

Figure Q: Net fiscal balance by region, financial year ending 2023

Net fiscal balance in FYE 2022 and FYE 2023, by country and region, UK, £ billion



Source: ONS, Country and regional public sector finances, UK - Office for National Statistics (June 2024)

Figure R: Good growth for cities index (2025)

2025 Good Growth Index scores by former LEP area, ranked in descending order by 2025 Good Growth Index score.

Rank	Other functional economic areas	2025 Index	2024 Index	Score difference	Rank change
1	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0.92	0.81	▲	•
2	Oxfordshire	0.66	0.66	▼	•
3	White Rose	0.62	0.55	▲	+1
4	Gloucestershire	0.59	0.06	▲	+22
5	West of England	0.59	0.57	▲	-2
6	Cotswold Edge	0.54	0.37	▲	+6
7	Wessex Coast	0.53	-0.31	▲	+26
8	Cumbria	0.53	0.45	▲	•
9	Cheshire and Warrington	0.50	0.35	▲	+5
10	Dorset	0.49	-0.15	▲	+20
11	Wessex Heartland	0.47	0.49	▼	-4
12	Anglia Countryside	0.38	0.38	▲	-1
13	Wrekin Valley Lands	0.37	0.28	▲	+3
14	Hertfordshire	0.37	0.36	▲	-1
15	Downland Coast	0.36	0.24	▲	+4
16	South Coast Greenway	0.35	0.34	▲	-1
17	Lyme Forest Borders	0.26	0.26	▲	+1
18	Lancashire	0.23	0.50	▼	-12
19	Leicestershire	0.17	0.18	▼	+4
20	Cambridge County Arc	0.16	0.26	▼	-3
21	South East Midlands	0.14	0.20	▼	+1
22	Central Leeds	0.12	0.06	▲	+3
23	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	0.04	-0.02	▲	+4
24	Berkshire Woodlands	0.03	0.22	▼	-3
25	Central Liverpool	0.02	0.09	▼	-1
26	Yorkshire Coastlands	-0.03	0.54	▼	-21
27	Worcestershire	-0.03	0.41	▼	-17
28	North East	-0.05	-0.17	▲	+3
29	South East	-0.08	-0.10	▲	-1
30	Central Sheffield	-0.15	-0.21	▲	+2
31	Warwickshire	-0.19	0.23	▼	-11
32	Greater Manchester	-0.22	-0.31	▲	+2
33	Greater Birmingham	-0.22	-0.31	▲	+2
34	Chiltern Riverlands	-0.22	0.44	▼	-25
35	Teesside	-0.36	-0.40	▲	+2
36	Greater Lincolnshire	-0.50	-0.11	▼	-7
37	Black Country	-0.76	-0.33	▼	-1

Source: Demos / PwC Analysis (2025)

Note: Data covers period of 2021 – 2023

Source: PWC, Good Growth for Cities: Smarter choices, better outcomes, page 13 (September 2025)

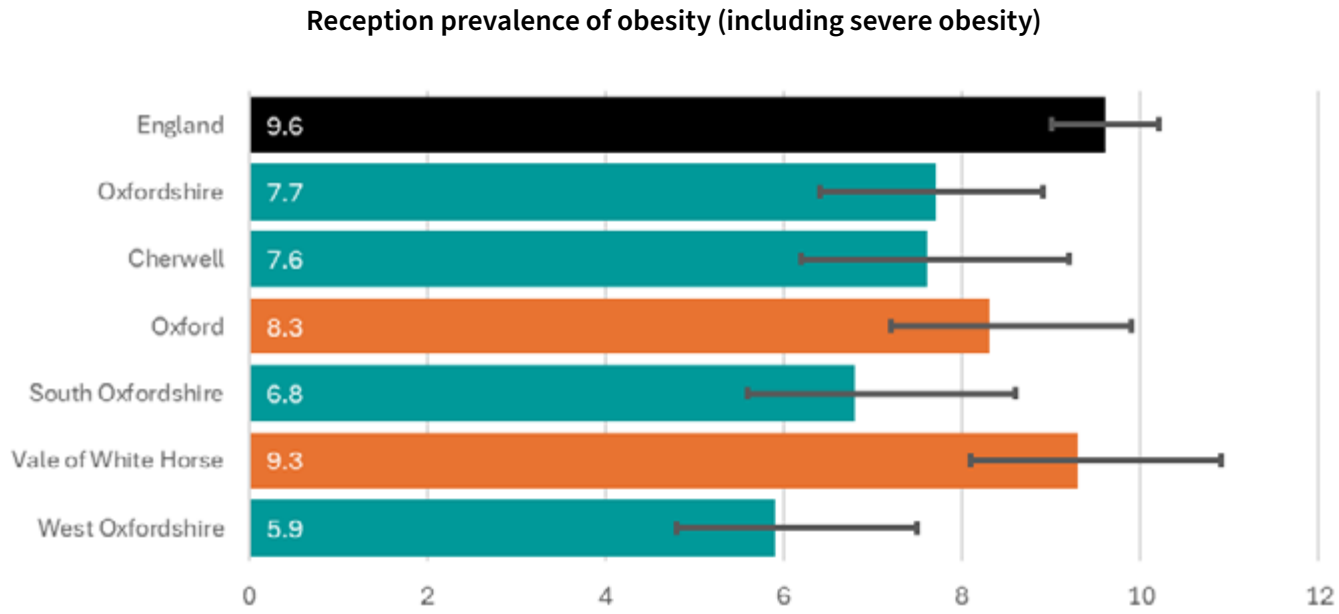
Health

Figure S: Proportion of the population who are disabled (%), Oxfordshire, district council and areas and England average

Local Authority	Proportion of population that are disabled under the Equality Act 2010
England	16.9%
Oxfordshire	14.2%
Cherwell	14.1%
Oxford	14.3%
South Oxfordshire	13.7%
Vale of White Horse	14.4%
West Oxfordshire	14.7%

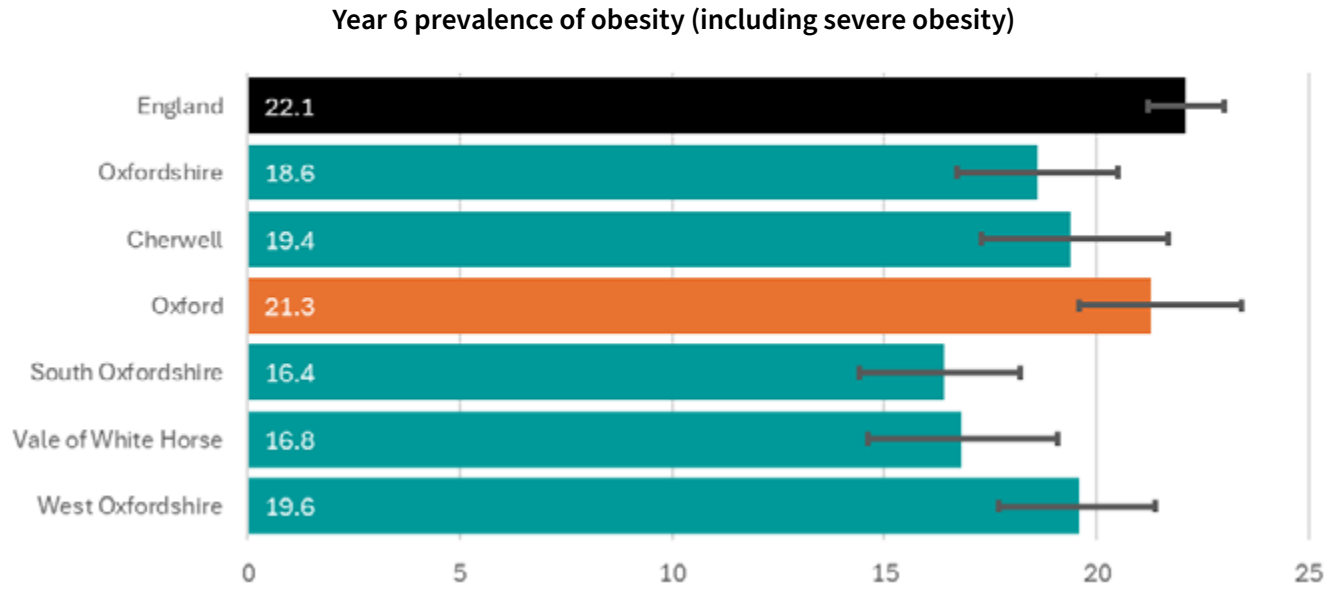
Source: ONS, Disability, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics (table RM073) (January 2023)

Figure T: Prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) amongst children in reception, Oxfordshire, district council areas and England average (2023/24)



Source: Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care

Figure U: Prevalence of obesity (including severe obesity) amongst children in year 6, Oxfordshire, district council areas and England average (2023/24)



Source: Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care

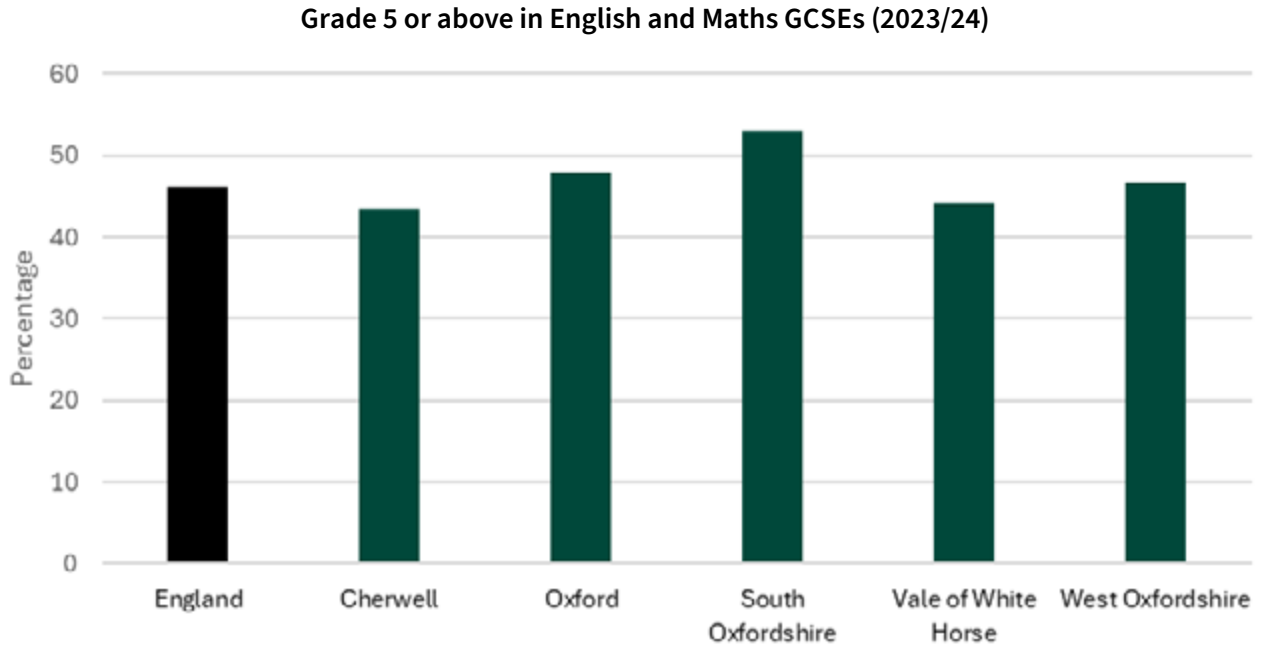
Education

Figure V: Level 3 attainment, Oxfordshire district council areas (2023/24)

Local Authority	% achieving at least two substantial level 3 results
Cherwell	94.5
Oxford	76.4
South Oxfordshire	90.5
Vale of White Horse	89.4
West Oxfordshire	98.1

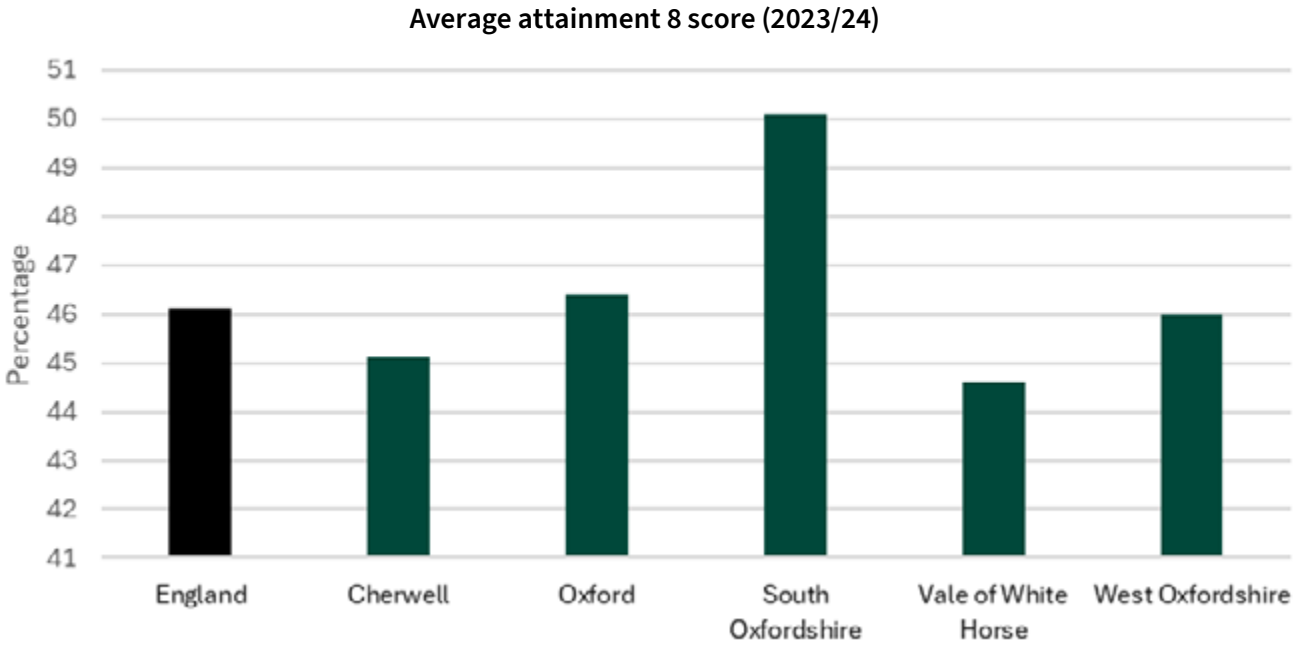
Source: Explore Education Statistics (September 2025)

Figure W: Grade 5 or above in English and Maths GCSEs, Oxfordshire district council areas and England average (2023/24)



Source: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/daab642b-d51a-41e3-7d74-08dde95299cd (September 2025)

Figure X: Attainment 8 score, Oxfordshire district council areas and England average (2023/24)



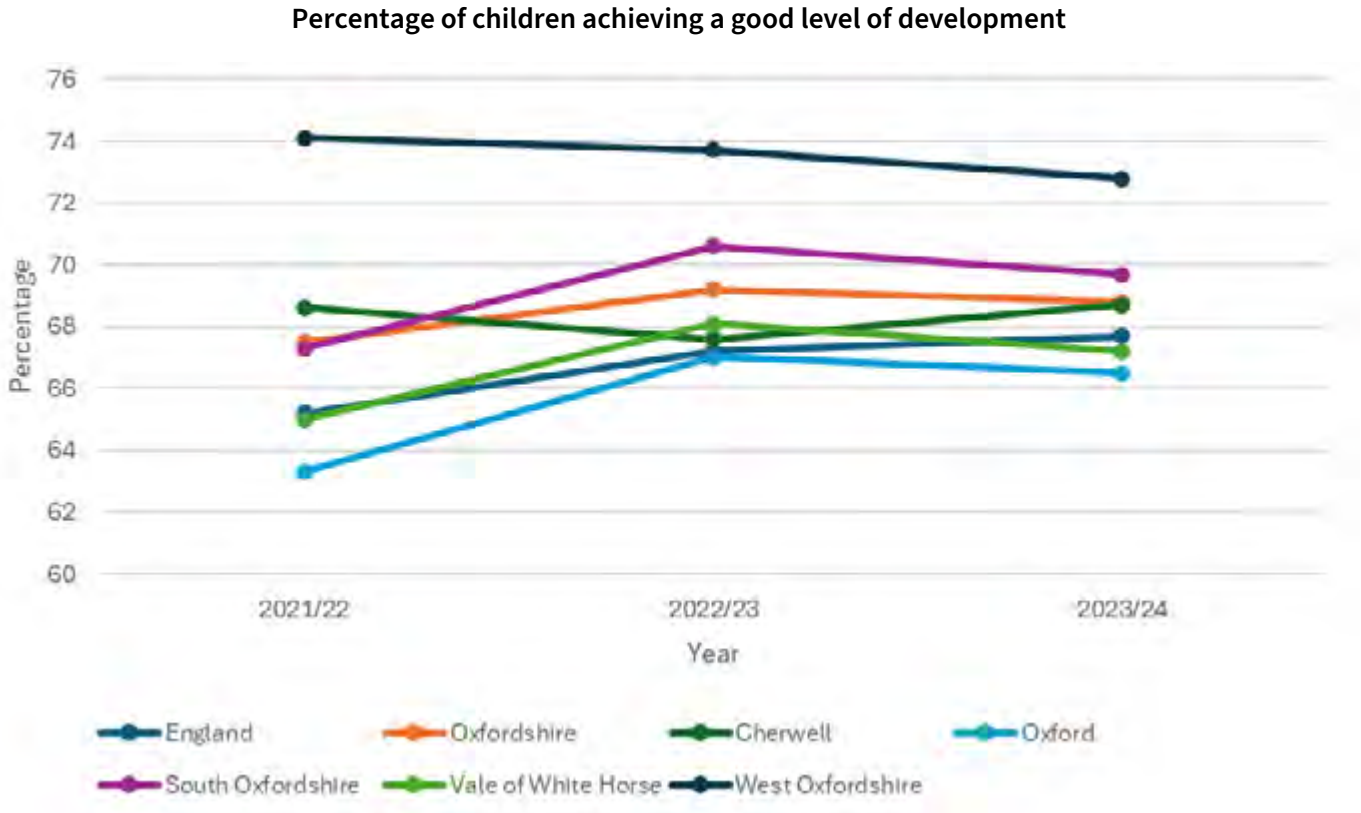
Source: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/daab642b-d51a-41e3-7d74-08dde95299cd (September 2025)

Figure Y: Key stage 2 students meeting or exceeding the expected standard for reading, writing and maths (%), Oxfordshire districts and England average (2018/19-2023/24)

Year	Cherwell	Oxford	South Oxfordshire	Vale of White Horse	West Oxfordshire	England
2018/19	67	59	67	66	64	65
2021/22	61	55	58	56	58	59
2022/23	60	57	61	60	59	60
2023/24	62	59	63	58	61	61

Source: Attainment by pupil residency and pupil characteristics, Data set from Key stage 2 attainment - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (February 2025)

Figure Z: Early Years Foundations Stage (EYFS), percentage of children achieving a good level of development, Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire districts and England average (2021/22-2023/24)

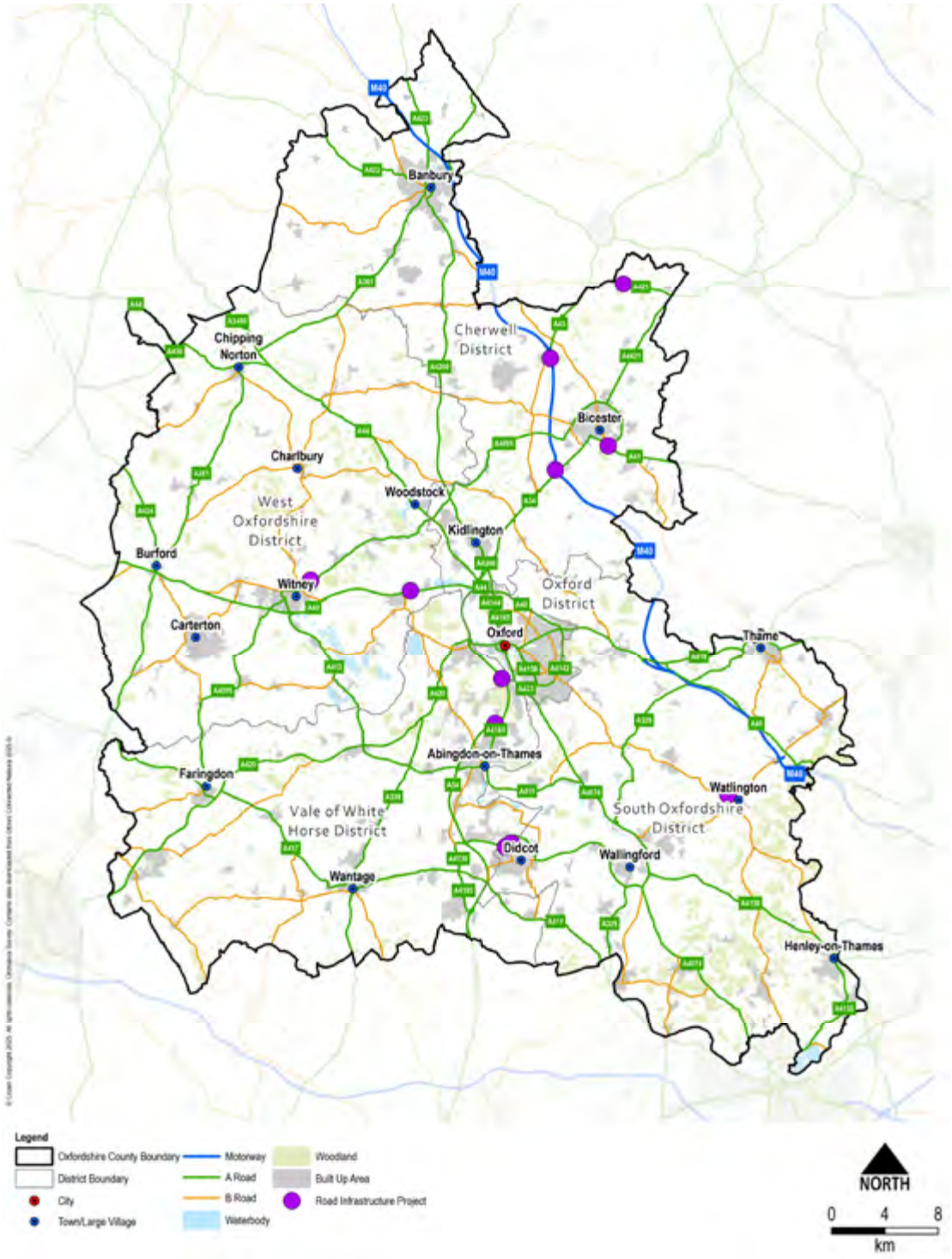


Source: https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/a212ad92-e9fe-4d8e-1a4c-08dde95206d2 (September 2025)

Note: the chart's Y axis does not start at zero.

Strategic planning and infrastructure

Figure AA: Major transport infrastructure investment in roads



Source: AECOM, Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) stage 1 baseline report page 59 (August 2025)
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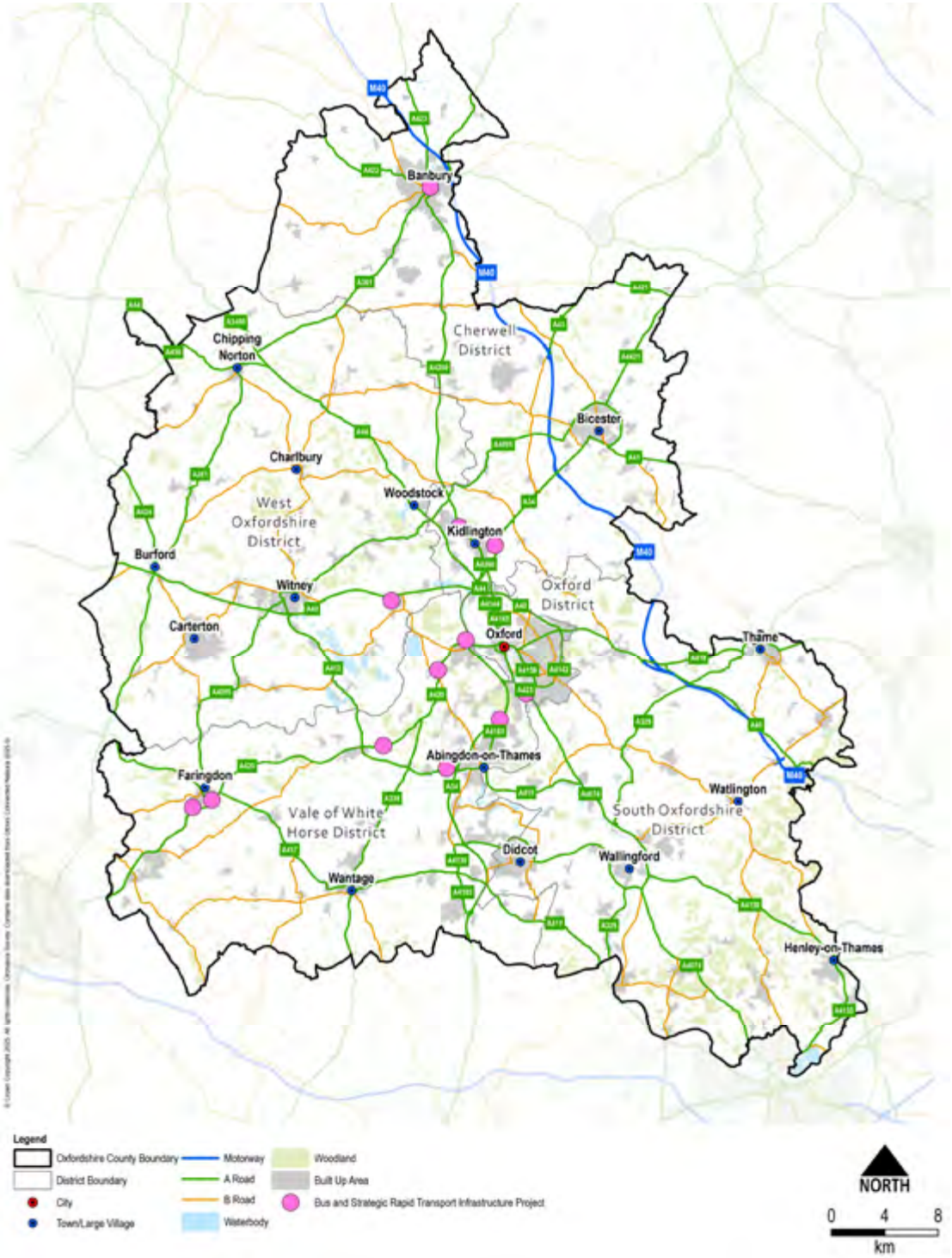
Figure AB: Major transport infrastructure investment in bus, coach and strategic rapid transport



Source: AECOM, Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) stage 1 baseline report page 71 (August 2025)
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Figure AC: Major active travel infrastructure investment in walking, cycling and low traffic management

Source: AECOM, Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) stage 1 baseline report page 78 (August 2025)
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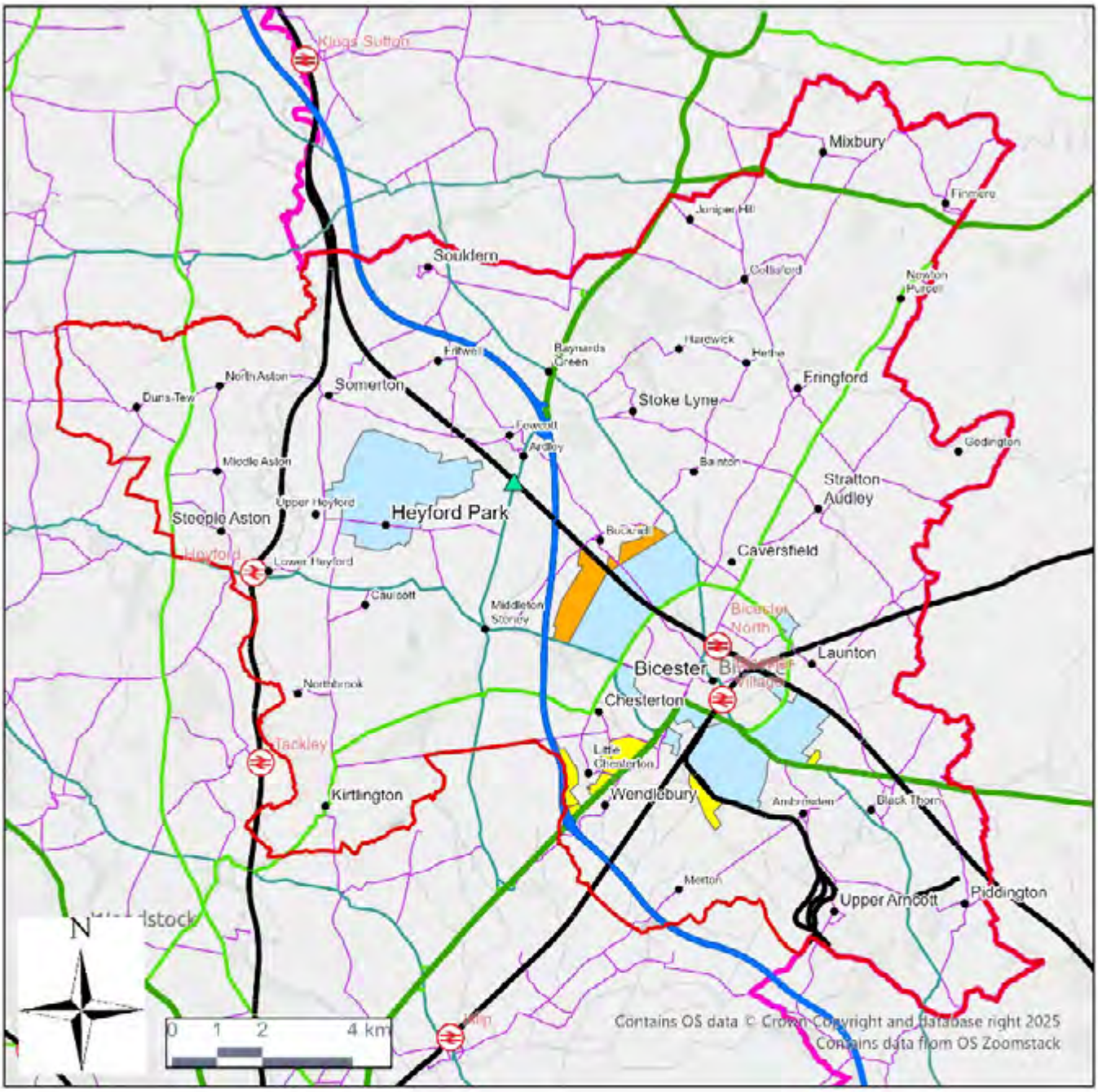
Figure AD: Growth and Development in Bicester: Bicester and mid-Cherwell Growth Map



Source: Oxfordshire County Council

Figure AE: Growth and development in Didcot: Didcot Garden Town

The sites shown below and listed to the right have been identified by South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils, and form a picture of the scale of development which might be possible over the next 15-30 year period in Didcot. The sites have been divided so as to distinguish those which are already in the planning process, from those which are allocated as employment sites and those which have been identified as opportunity sites. These have been identified as opportunities for both new development and/ or the creation of enhanced landscape features and improved public spaces.

Identified development sites

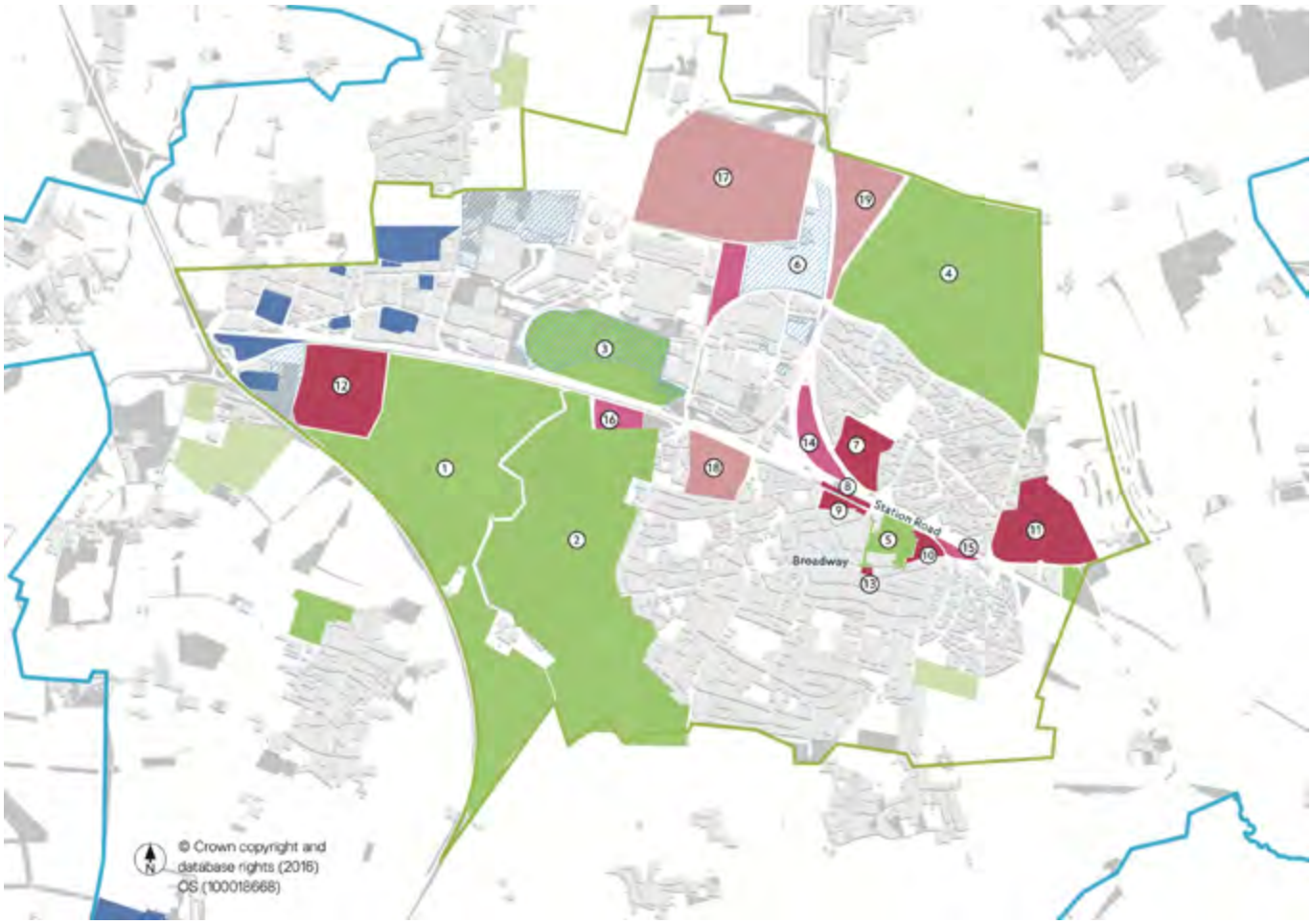
- Planning applications (permission granted, or resolution to grant)
- Planning applications (pending)
- Science Vale enterprise zone (EZ)
- Didcot Growth Accelerator EZ
- (1) Valley Park
- (2) Great Western Park
- (3) Didcot A power station
- (4) North East Didcot
- (5) Orchard Centre Phase two
- (6) D-Tech

Boundaries

- Didcot Garden Town area of influence
- Didcot Garden Town masterplan

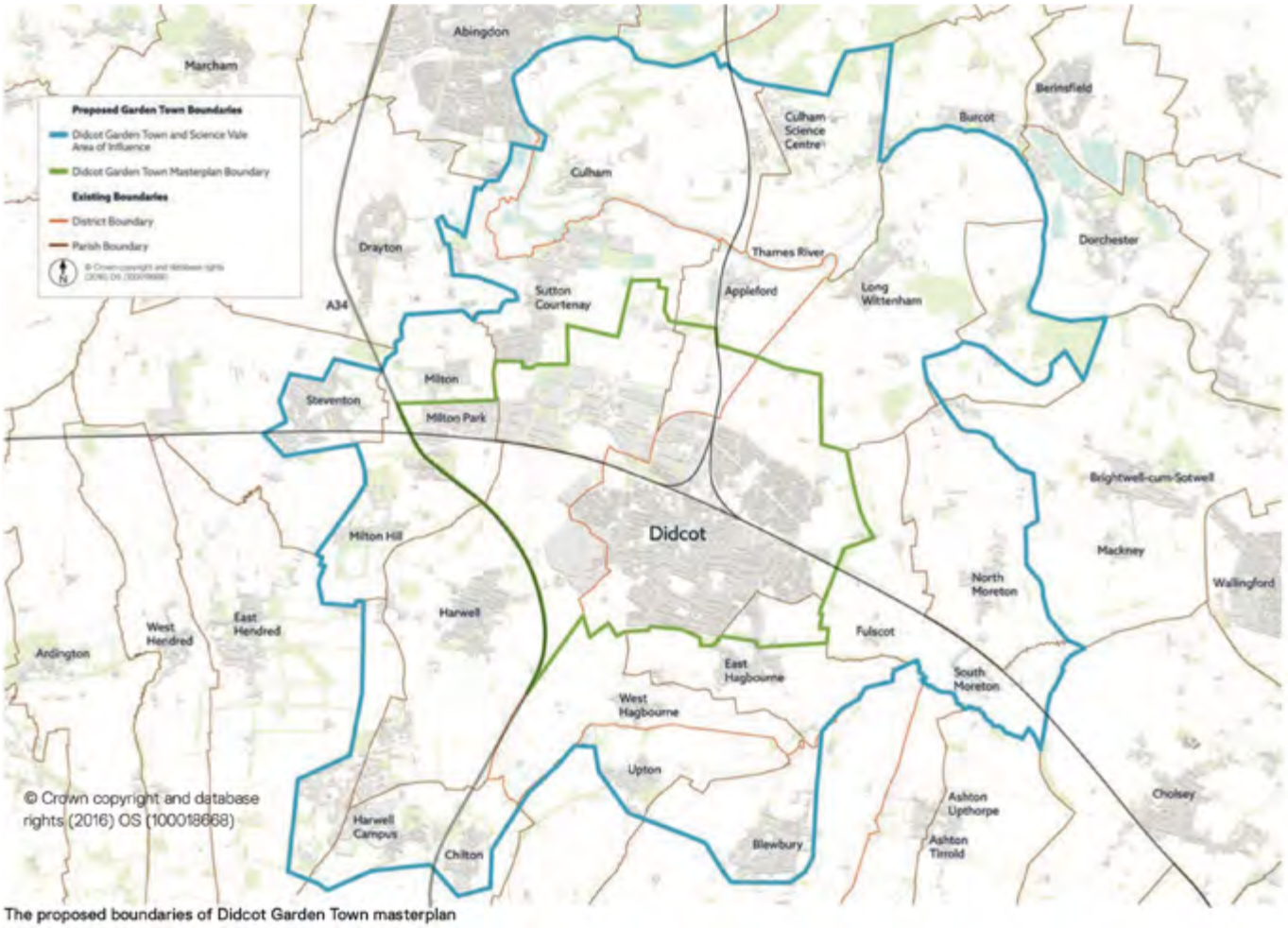
Opportunity sites

- Opportunity site (near term - next 10 years)
- Opportunity site (medium term - next 20 years)
- Opportunity site (Long term - next 30 years)
- (7) Didcot Gateway North
- (8) Didcot Station
- (9) Didcot Gateway South
- (10) Rich's Sidings
- (11) Ladygrove East
- (12) North West Valley Park
- (13) Baptist House
- (14) Didcot Railway Centre
- (15) Land east of Rich's Sidings
- (16) Land south of A4130
- (17) Appleford landfill
- (18) Vauxhall Barracks
- (19) Land west of North East Didcot



Source: Didcot Garden Town Master Plan, (https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/10/Delivery-Plan-Chapter-9-10th-October-2017-web-q-5.pdf) page 306 (October 2017)

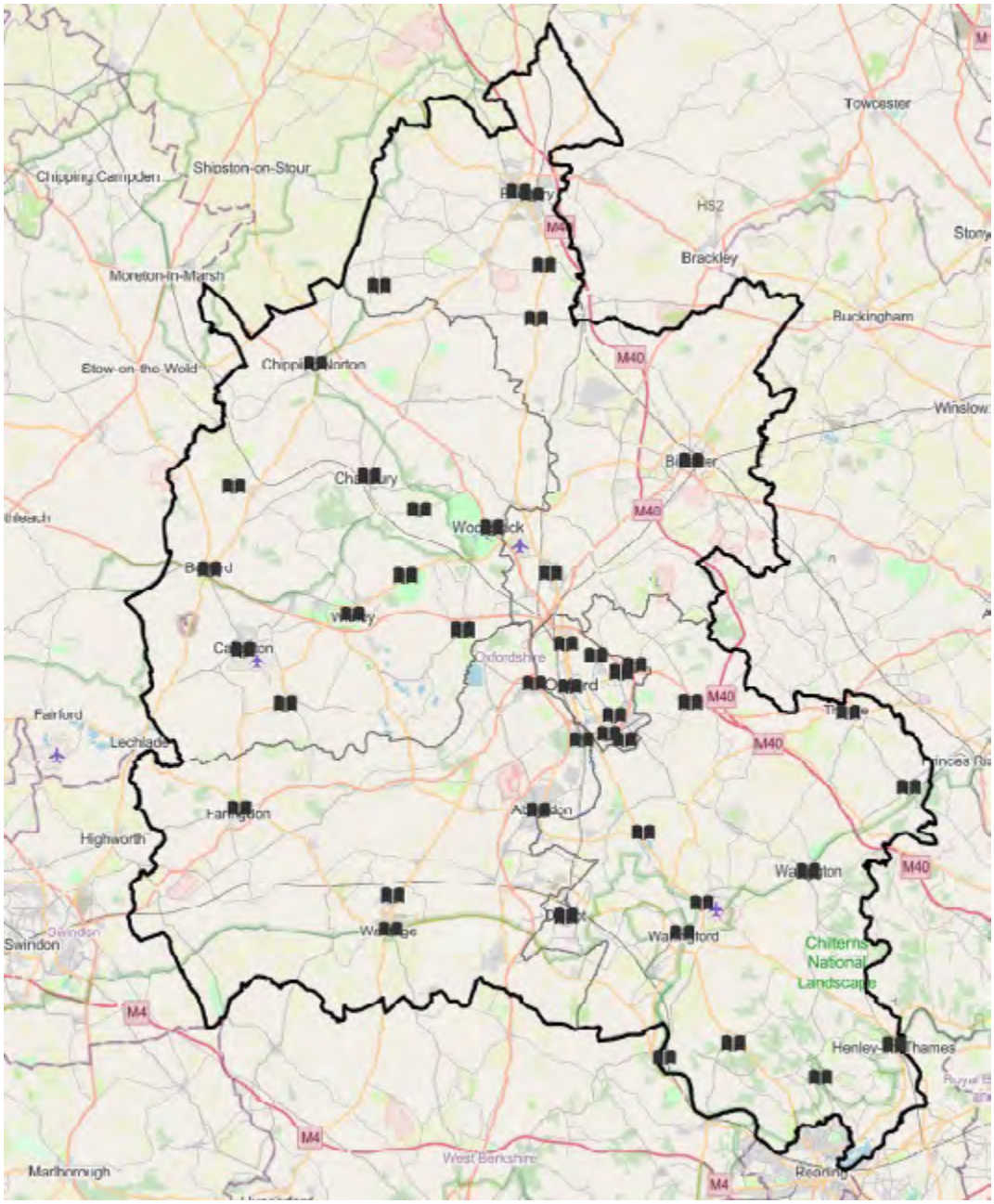
Figure AF: Growth and development in Didcot: Didcot Garden Town area of influence



The proposed boundaries of Didcot Garden Town masterplan

Source: Didcot Garden Town Master Plan, (https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/10/Delivery-Plan-Chapter-9-10th-October-2017-web-q-5.pdf) page 304 (October 2017)

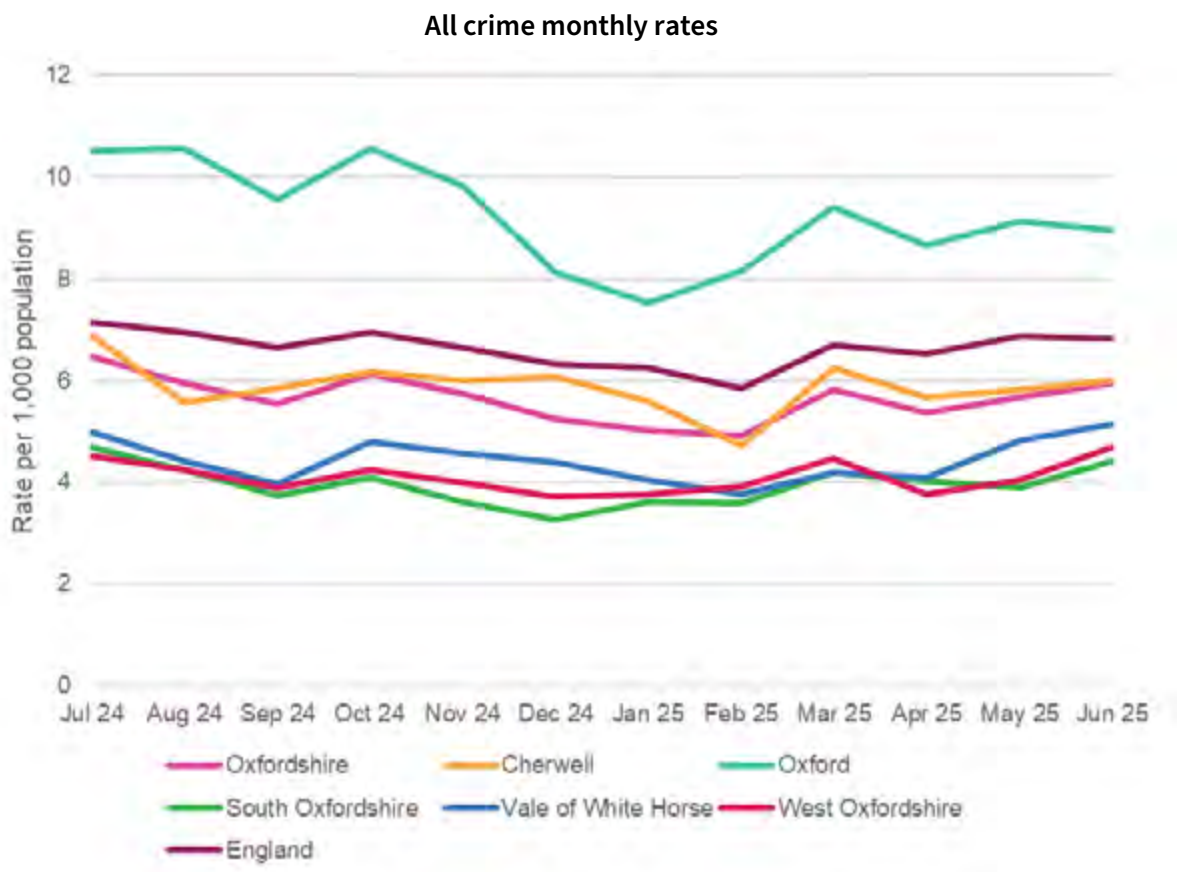
Figure AG: Oxfordshire library locations



Source: Oxfordshire County Council

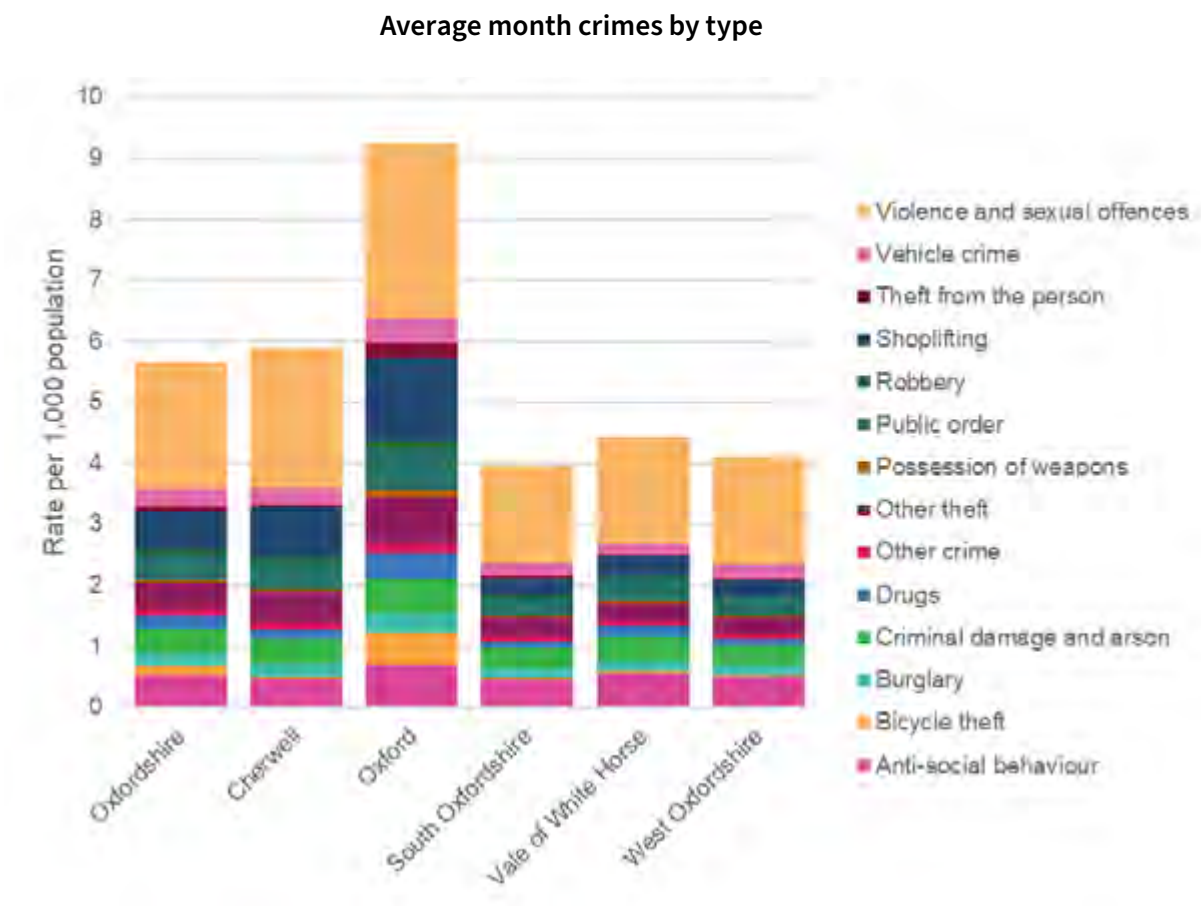
Crime

Figure AH: Monthly crime rates, Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire districts and England average (2024/25)



Source: Data downloads | data.police.uk

Figure AI: Average monthly crimes per 1,000 population, Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire district council areas (2024/25))



Source: [Data downloads | data.police.uk]

Appendix 2

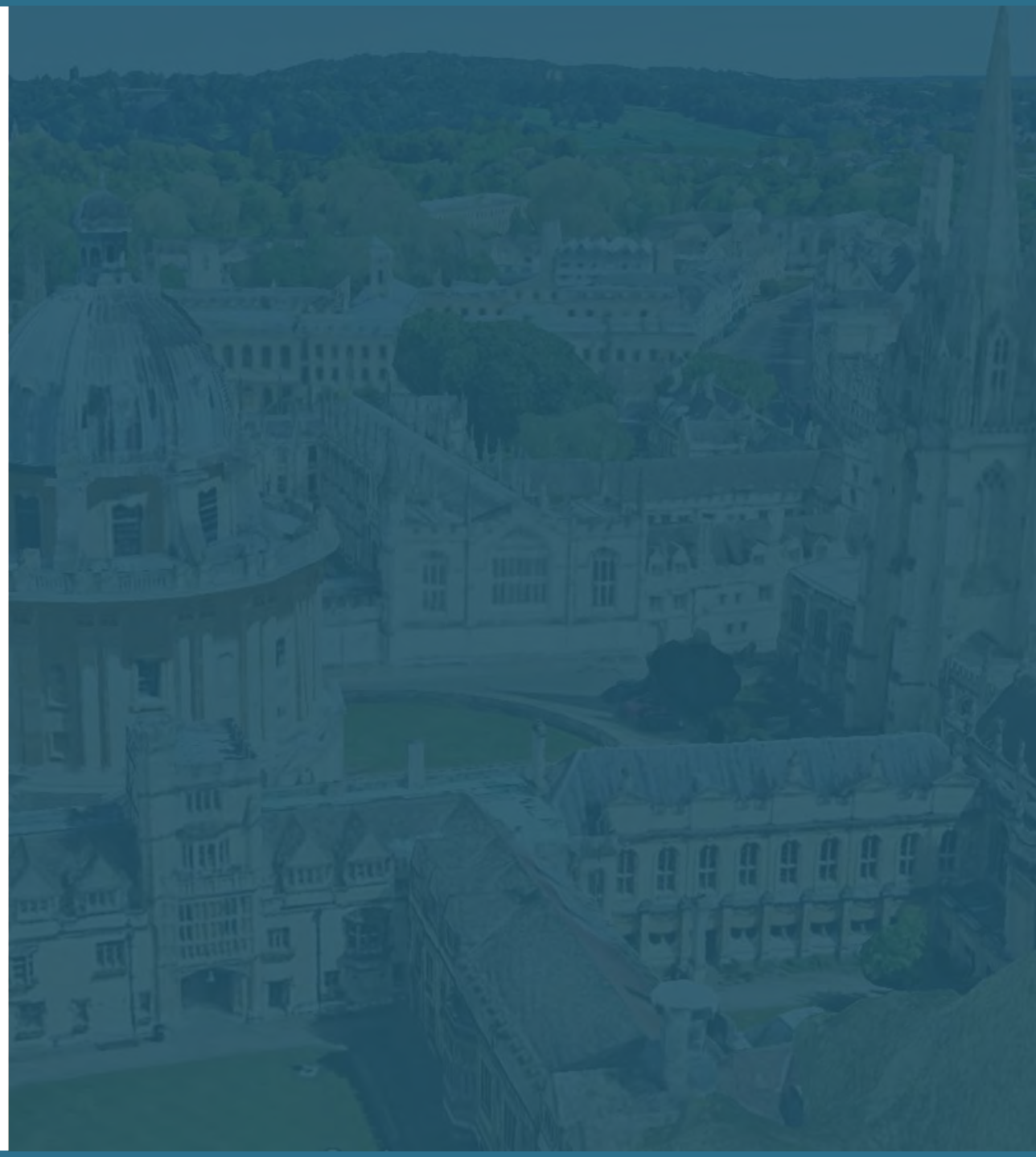
Metro Dynamics - Thames Valley Devolution Report

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Metro——Dynamics

Thames Valley Devolution Report

12th September Devolution Summit



September 2025

This report presents the economic case for devolution across the Thames Valley. It is intended to support the development of a compelling and viable devolution proposal with local buy-in and national support.

The Thames Valley comprises economically strong but functionally separate areas. Despite its economic strengths, the region has not fully recovered post-COVID, especially along the M4 corridor. A Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) could provide the governance needed to unlock regional integration, drive innovation, and support inclusive growth.

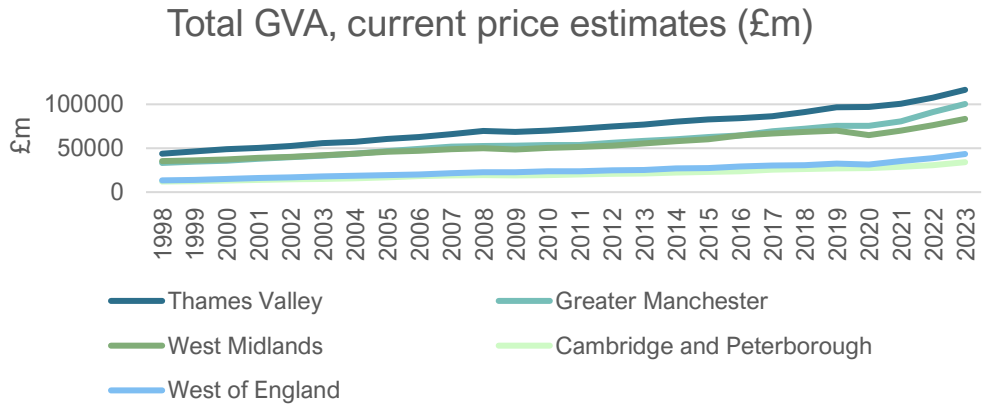
This report explores how a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) could provide the governance and institutional framework to drive that integration, leveraging sectoral complementarity, improving connectivity, and enabling coordinated investment across a wider footprint. Drawing on lessons from other MSAs, it considers how such a model could be adapted to the polycentric geography of the Thames Valley, and what it could deliver in terms of innovation, infrastructure, and inclusive growth.

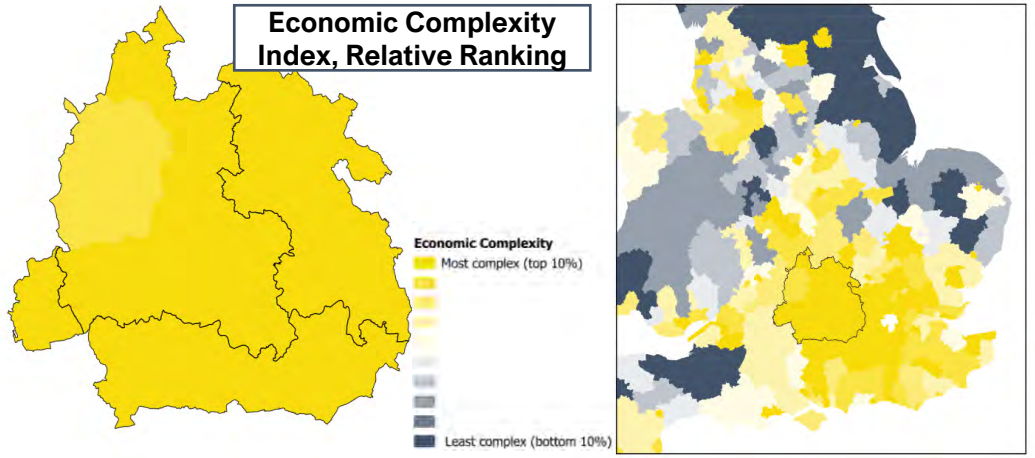
The Thames Valley economies are linked by their complexity, productivity, and strong economic assets

The Thames Valley authorities of Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Swindon have a combined population of 2.5 million, generating £117 billion in GVA in 2023; this accounts for 5% of England's total economy whilst only hosting 4% of the national population. This is demonstrable of constituent economies that are highly productive, making the region one of the country's few places with the both the scale and coherence to accelerate national priorities at pace.

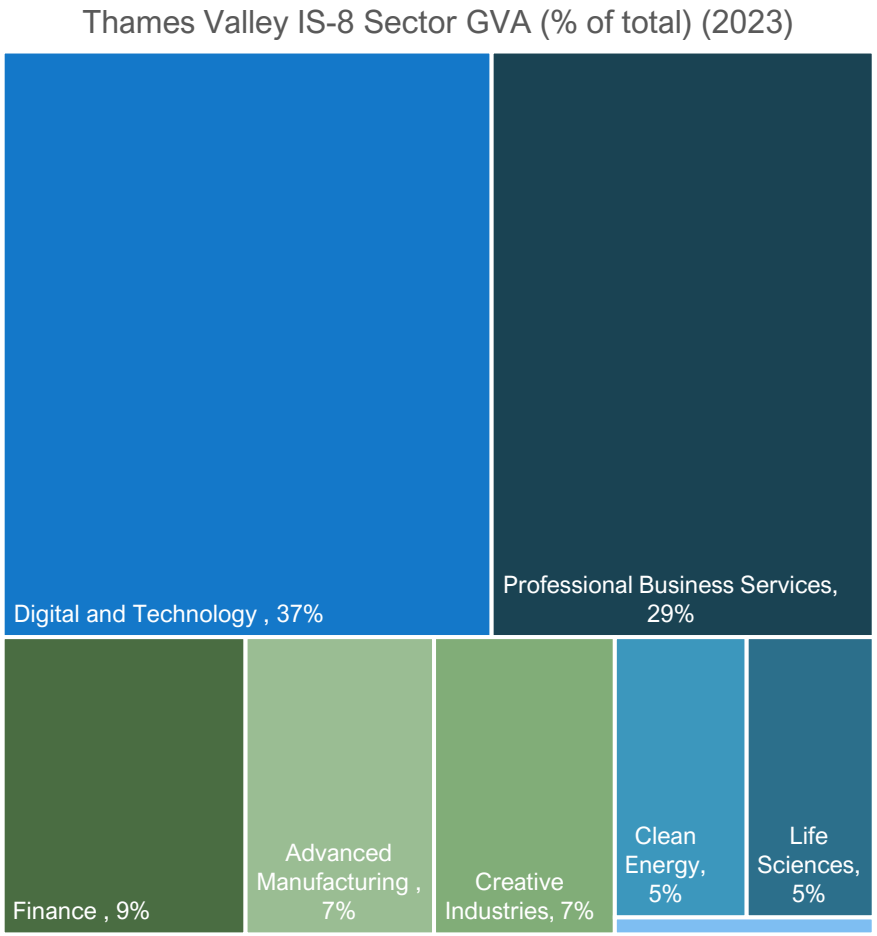
The Thames Valley's asset base is both strong and complementary. The M4 and M40 corridors, Heathrow connectivity and the Elizabeth Line reduce trade and commuting frictions, while Oxfordshire's world-class research system, university campuses and science parks, together with a deep pool of highly educated workers, sustain clusters of knowledge-intensive firms. This combination of infrastructure, talent and research capability creates a highly investable environment, reducing delivery risk and offering a strong platform for both public and private capital to achieve rapid, scalable impact.

The Thames Valley ranks among England's most complex economies, with all four authorities in the top 20 percent nationally. High complexity signals a capacity to innovate, diversify and absorb shocks - traits essential for long-term resilience and competitiveness. Nearly half of its workforce is employed in export-linked industries, far above the national average, indicating strong global integration and exposure to international markets. This means the constituent Thames Valley economies are individually well positioned to adapt quickly, capture emerging technologies and deliver inclusive growth.





Sectors in the region are well positioned to drive national growth, in line with the goals of the industrial strategy



The Thames Valley's growth is driven by a concentrated mix of high-value Industrial Strategy-8 sectors. Professional and Business Services is the region's anchor sector, accounting for 11-19% of jobs across the four authorities, generating a combined GVA total of £15.7 billion in 2023. Digital Technology is also significant, particularly in Berkshire, delivering £13.8 billion in 2023 with Oxfordshire adding £3.6 billion. Complementary sector strengths deepen the offer: Life Sciences is expanding, with Berkshire's GVA roughly doubling to about £1 billion; Finance is a distinctive specialism in Swindon at £2.3 billion and 9% of local jobs; whilst the Creative Industries are large in both Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire and Advanced Manufacturing is notable in Oxfordshire.

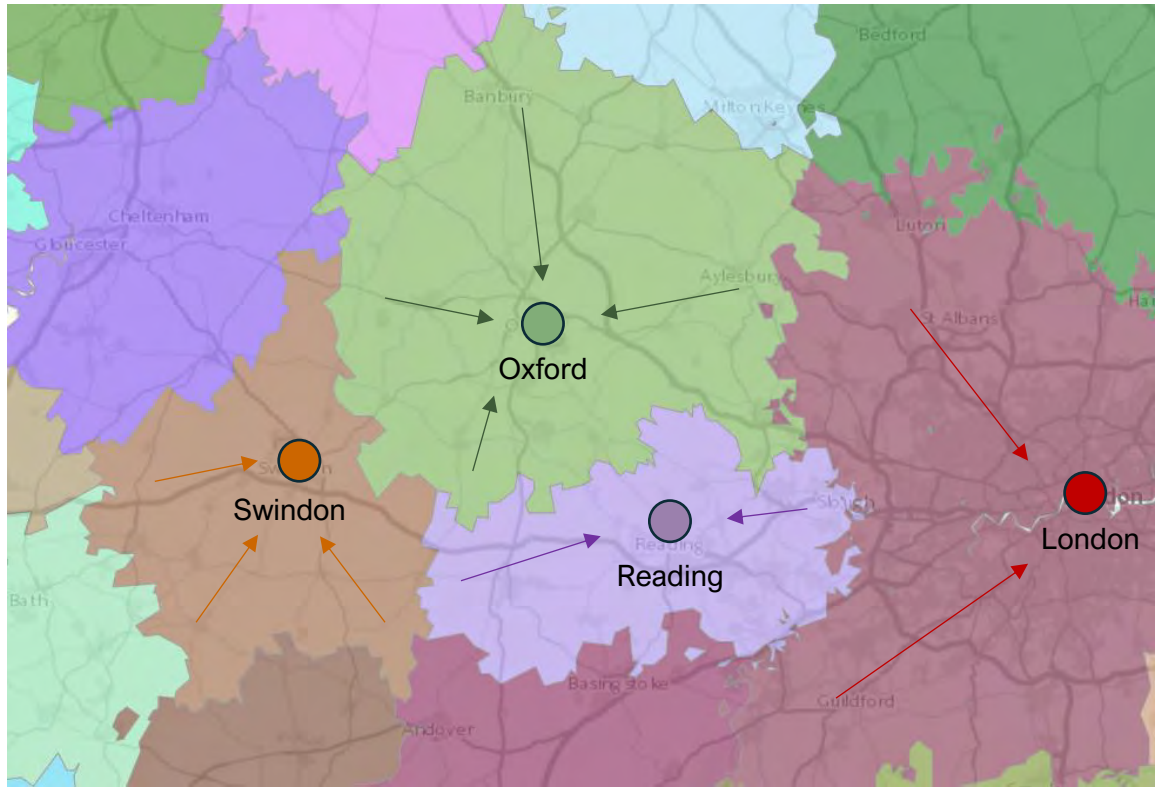
The Thames Valley's sectoral mix creates a powerful platform for innovation and growth. Professional and business services provide the legal, advisory, engineering and research expertise that turns ideas into market-ready products, reducing transaction costs and accelerating scale-up. Digital technologies run through every part of the economy, enabling advanced analytics, automation, design and AI-driven discovery that enhance productivity in life sciences, manufacturing and creative industries. Finance adds the capital and operational infrastructure needed for firms to expand into national and global markets. Coordinating these strengths will convert research into commercial value, drive export-led growth and attract large-scale private investment, positioning the Thames Valley to deliver a Local Growth Plan that advances the national Industrial Strategy and supports Government missions on productivity, innovation and prosperity.

Thames Valley does not yet act as a single integrated economic geography, with three distinct high-skill focal points

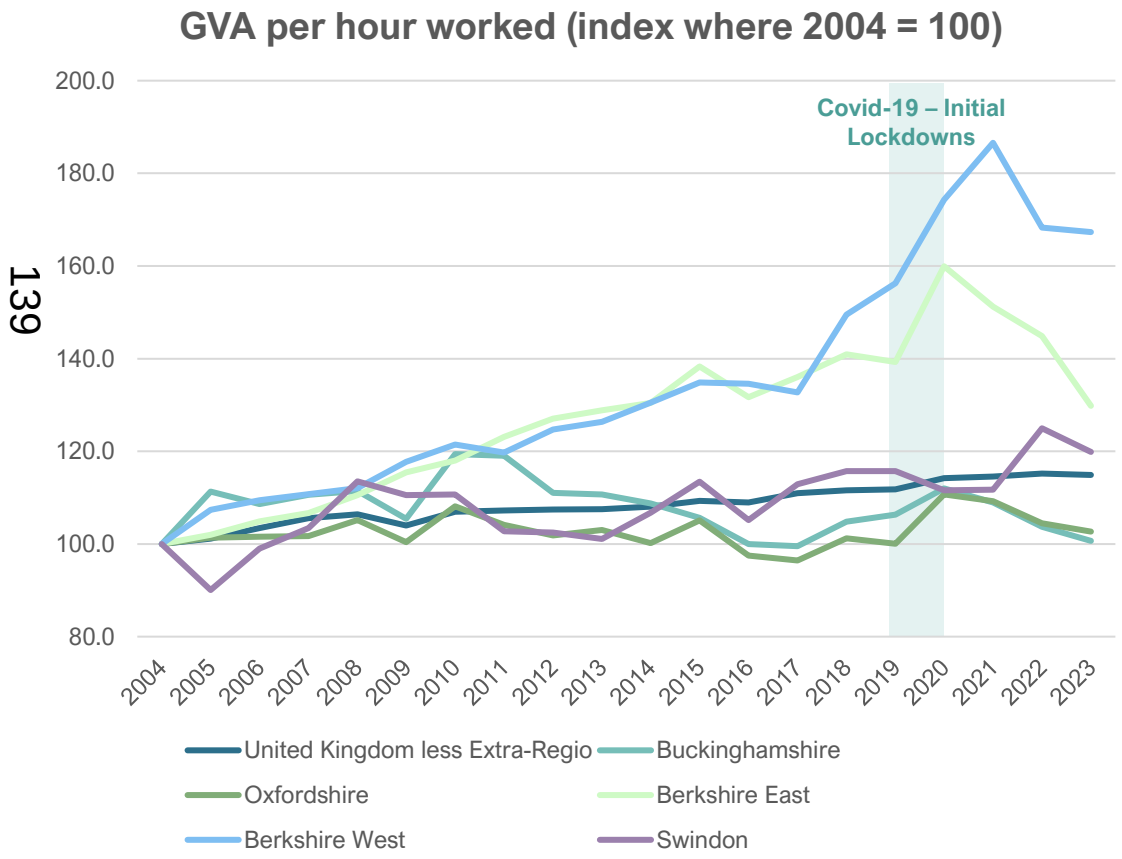
Despite shared strengths in high-value sectors and a consistently high level of economic complexity, the Thames Valley does not operate as a single, integrated economic geography. Labour market patterns reveal three distinct centres of gravity around Oxford, Reading and Swindon, with commuting flows largely contained within each sub-region rather than across the corridor. Travel-to-work data and connectivity analysis show that while Berkshire and Oxfordshire are linked along the M4 and A34, Buckinghamshire and Swindon maintain weaker ties to these hubs.

These structural realities mean that the Thames Valley's complementarities remain under-leveraged. Digital and professional services in Berkshire, research and life sciences in Oxfordshire, finance in Swindon and creative industries in Buckinghamshire all generate value, but the absence of integrated governance and coordinated infrastructure planning constrains the spillovers that could arise from closer alignment. Without a unifying framework, opportunities to connect supply chains, share talent and accelerate innovation across the corridor are diluted, leaving the region performing strongly in parts but falling short of its collective potential.

Figure: high-skill travel-to work areas in the Thames Valley (2011 Census)



Productivity growth has largely stalled in the years following the Covid-19 pandemic



The Thames Valley has long combined high absolute productivity with strong historical growth, but since the pandemic its trajectory has softened in ways not mirrored nationally. Productivity indices show clear post-Covid declines in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire and signs of plateauing in Berkshire after exceptional gains in the 2010s, while the UK aggregate continued to edge up through 2023. This weakening reflects pressures seen across all local economies - rising housing and land costs, fragmented transport networks, skills mismatches and health inequalities - alongside hybrid working patterns that have diluted within-region spillovers and raised delivery frictions for firms.

To re-establish an upward productivity path and spread prosperity, the four economies need to function more like a connected system. A devolution settlement and a single Local Growth Plan provide the governance and instruments to do this at pace, turning complementary strengths into cross-boundary supply chains, deeper labour markets and quicker diffusion of innovation, and with that, a return to sustained productivity growth across the Thames Valley.

Mayoral Strategic Authorities have the powers to bring together local economies

Under the framework established by the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, Mayoral Strategic Authorities (MSA's) have distinct powers and spending remits to local authorities. Their core remits are intended to align with functional economic areas, reflecting that resident lives often don't match up neatly with narrow and often arbitrary local authority boundaries. MSA's have a range of power and levers to address:

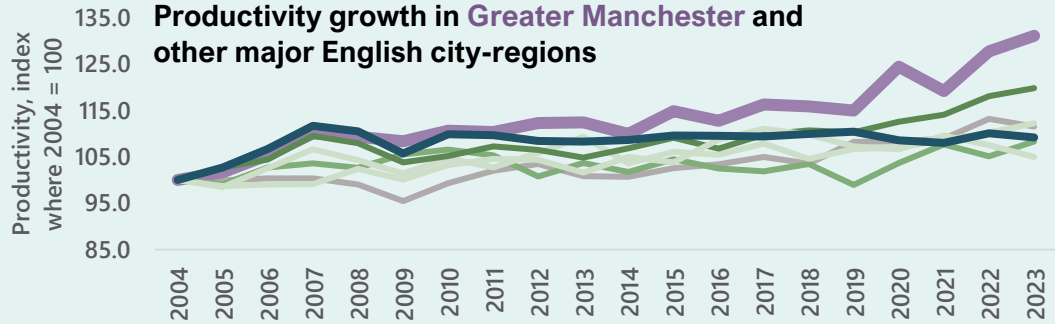
- Transport and connectivity, including the inter-urban infrastructure that could bring together unconnected economies into a cohesive labour market
- Housing and regeneration, including urban densification levers and increasing influence over affordable housing policy.
- Skills and labour market policy, including influencing skills pipelines for key growth sectors though local budgets.

Taken together, these powers offer a significant suite of levers to influence and align local economies with the benefits of scale, including supporting agglomeration effects – the learning, sharing and matching mechanisms that underpin many of the economic advantages possessed by major city regions, conurbations, and industrial clusters.

Case Study: Growth in Greater Manchester

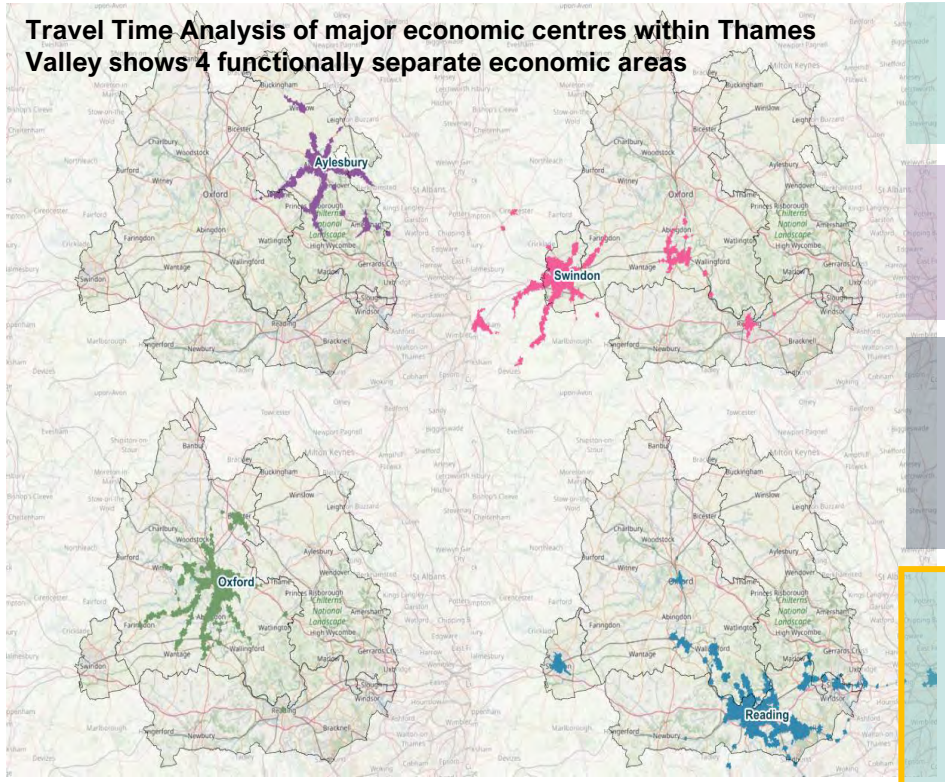
Greater Manchester is England's longest established Mayoral Strategic Authority. Founded in 2008 and with a Mayor elected in 2015, it has been co-ordinating policy and delivery across the ten GM local authorities over decades. Major policy initiatives have included the £1.5bn Metrolink tram expansion, the Working Well economic inactivity programme, and the "Greater Manchester" model of public service reform and early intervention.

Greater Manchester has also seen substantial economic growth over recent decades and is now the most economically productive major city outside of London. Some economists have highlighted the potential role of increased agglomeration effects in supporting growth locally by expanding local labour markets, although further work is required to identify direct cause and effect.



A Thames Valley MSA could be the necessary platform for scaling investment and growth

Economic development theory and practical experience indicate that closer agglomeration among these economies could drive sustained growth.



Travel Time Analysis of major economic centres within Thames Valley shows 4 functionally separate economic areas

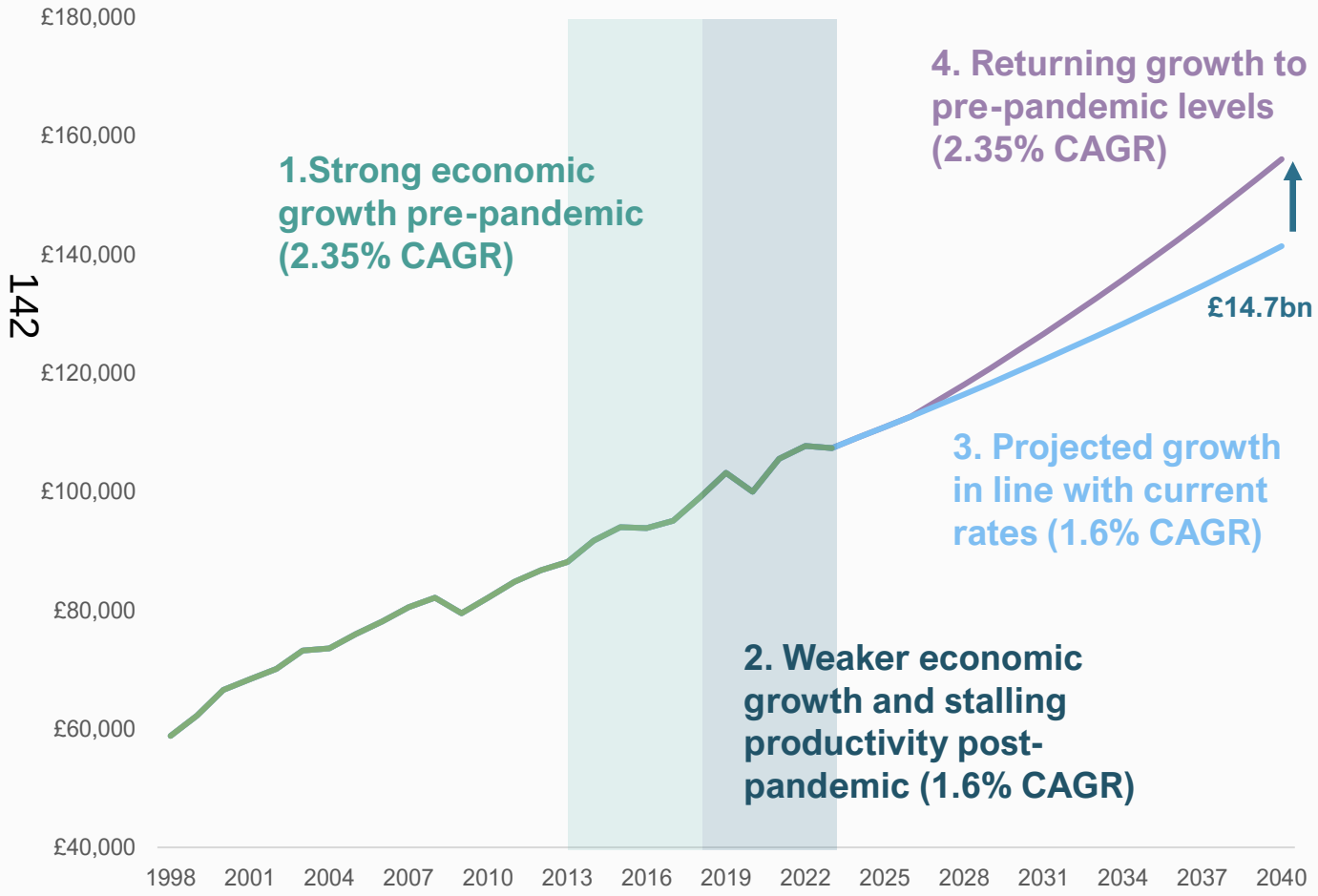
Evidence from existing MSAs, like Greater Manchester, have shown that leaning into agglomeration-led policies can lead to impressive productivity gains.

The Thames Valley is a fundamentally different geography – it is a polycentric region with multiple equivalently strong economic hubs, sharing more in common with a “Northern Powerhouse” type geography

This growth model aligns with the national focus on linking complementary centres, as seen in the Oxford–Cambridge Arc. However, while the Arc is a pan-regional partnership with limited powers, a Thames Valley MSA would bring statutory levers - on transport, housing, skills and investment - enabling greater ambition and more effective delivery

The strongest economic case is for an MSA across Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Swindon, to maximise complementarity and agglomeration benefits. However, the optimum geography is ultimately a political choice. Even partial integration among some of these authorities would deliver significantly greater economic benefits than inaction.

And help to return growth to the stronger pre-pandemic trajectory



Before the Covid-19 pandemic (2013-2018), the Thames Valley area was outperforming growth across the wider UK economy, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 2.35%. However, following the pandemic and associated economic disruption, growth over recent years has slowed to a compounding average of 1.6% (although this still remains higher than growth across the UK in this period, which stood at 0.9%).

If the Thames Valley were to return to the pre-pandemic growth trajectory from 2027 on (assuming a period of growth mobilisation over the next two years), then the local economy would be £14.7bn a year larger by 2040, with significant benefits to local living standards and national tax revenues.

The MSA could focus on a small series of interventions to shape a new economic pathway

Collective action could take place from now, ahead of a formal devolution agreement, to build regional and investor confidence behind agglomeration-led projects and policies

Short term

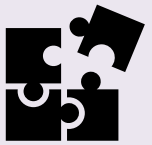
Establish the Thames Valley partnership and investment case internally and externally

Clear and early partnership consensus will, along with Government backing, send a clear signal to investors and businesses that the Thames Valley proposition will deliver growth and investment opportunities.

Learning from others, the partnership will need to agree joint operating principles and a compelling pipeline of investible projects that respond directly to the agglomeration model.

Medium term

Mobilise sectoral growth projects to leverage complementary and innovation



Local leaders should work closely with the private sector, institutions and investors to catalyse private sector investment in projects that will support the growth of the innovation-oriented sectors through cross-sector collaboration.

The Thames Valley already has a pipeline of projects which will drive this collaboration, including:

- *Life Science M4 Corridor* - from Harwell's Moderna Innovation Centre and Milton Park's lab expansion to Oxford Science Park's major growth plans and Berkshire's investment-ready schemes such as the Future Skills Hub in Slough and a new Health & Social Care College

Future projects should further aim to capitalise on untapped opportunities to generate new ideas that can be commercialised, increase trade and attract talent and further investment.

Longer-term actions should prioritise enabling an environment where clusters can emerge and strengthen naturally

Long term
Develop and secure investment in cross-regional transport infrastructure

Develop projects to address the transport connectivity challenge to unlock the the region as a cohesive economy and labour market. This is particularly important for the highly skilled workers at the forefront of innovative activity that is core to the Thames Valley's economic success.

There are a number of pipeline connectivity projects which are centred around the Thames Valley, including:

- *New GWR Oxford–Swindon link*: Will reintroduce direct services, reducing journey times and enabling stronger connections between Oxfordshire, Swindon, and the West of England
- *East West Rail (Oxford–Cambridge):* Will establish a strategic cross-arc corridor linking innovation hubs, unlocking housing and employment growth, and creating new interchange options with north-south main lines for enhanced national connectivity.

Projects likes these will drive agglomeration benefits through increased connections, reduced congestion and additional secondary development.

Operating principles are the first step to developing a strong investment case

Successful and established MSAs began with a series of principles to define how each precise kind of economic collaboration would work to drive growth (see WMCA example opposite)

Communicate the agreed theory for growth

Principles should describe the type of growth and pathway targeted by the partnership and the kind of investment and intervention that will be required, based on evidence of the current constituent economies and an agreed analysis of where and how growth can be achieved.

Set out the target size of the prize

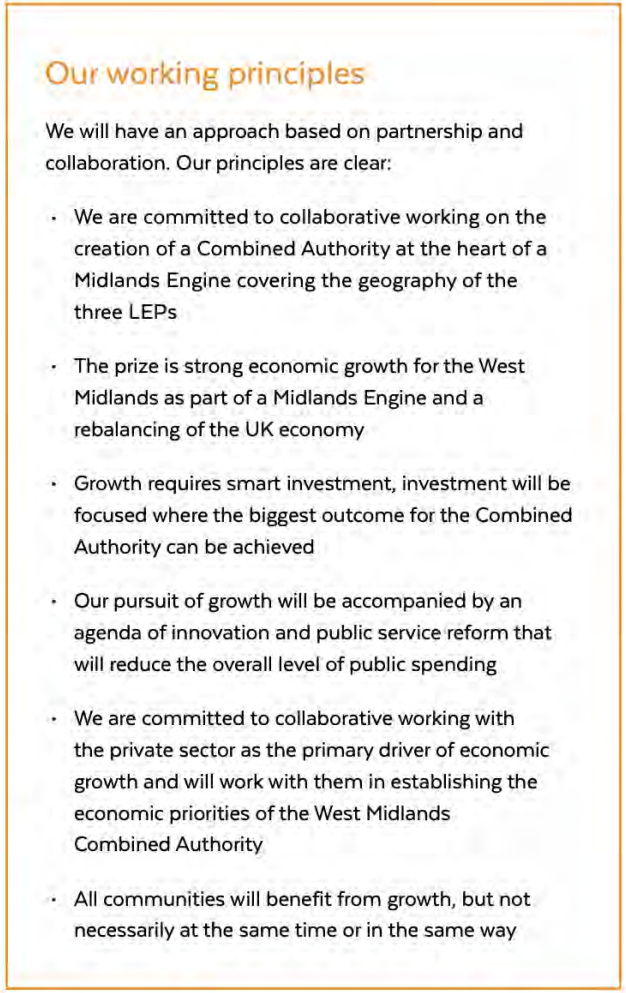
A quantified economic growth target should be explicitly articulated in these public facing principles, signifying a clear commitment and level of ambition to the market and Government stakeholders.

This should guide and drive investment activity and detailed proposition development.

Define how benefits will be derived

Economic collaboration across a polycentric economy will require choices and trade-offs to be made, with not all places directly benefitting at the same time or in the same way.

These parameters should be set out clearly at the outset to support leaders to make difficult decisions and focus and prioritise investment.



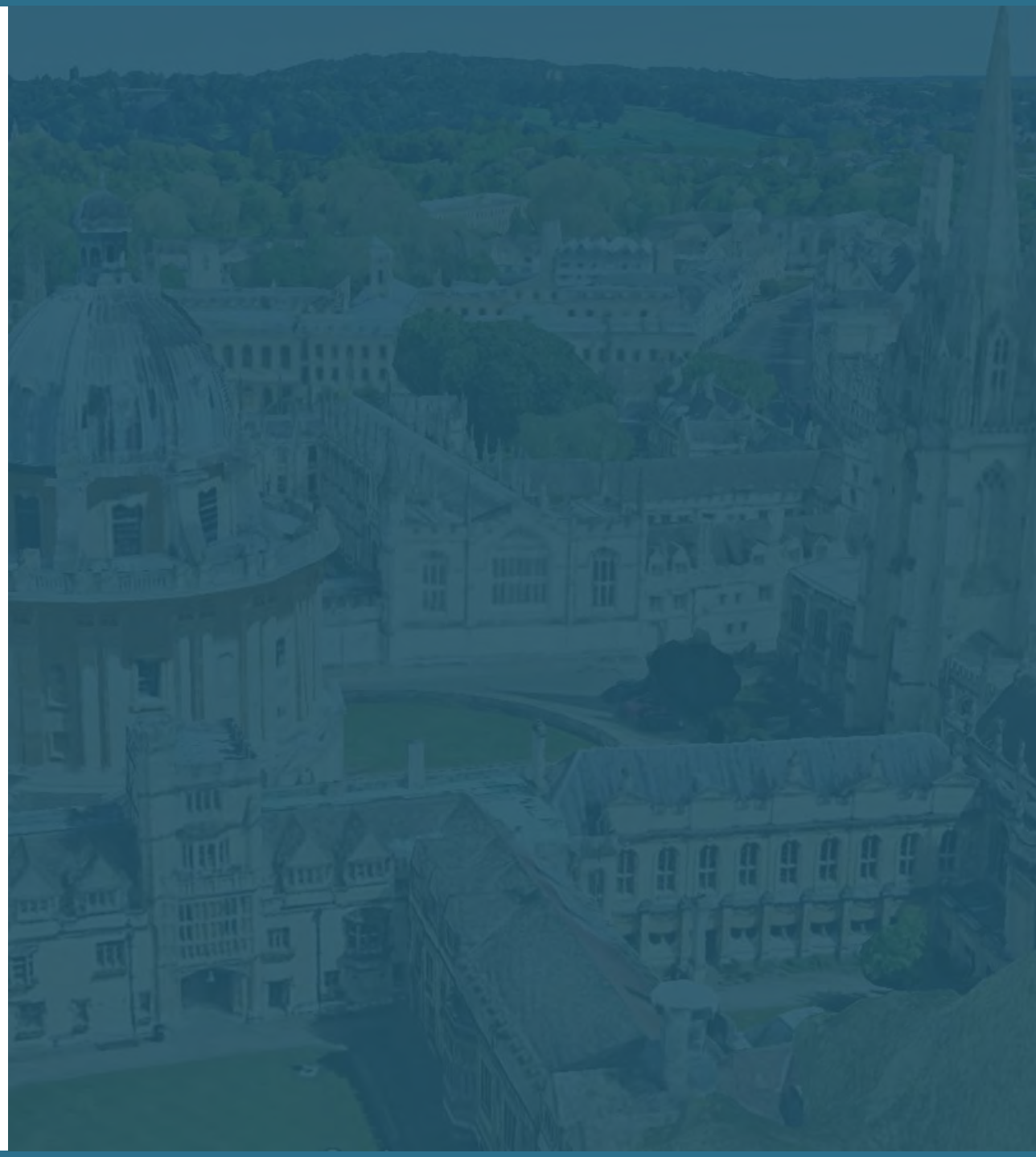
Our working principles

We will have an approach based on partnership and collaboration. Our principles are clear:

- We are committed to collaborative working on the creation of a Combined Authority at the heart of a Midlands Engine covering the geography of the three LEPs
- The prize is strong economic growth for the West Midlands as part of a Midlands Engine and a rebalancing of the UK economy
- Growth requires smart investment, investment will be focused where the biggest outcome for the Combined Authority can be achieved
- Our pursuit of growth will be accompanied by an agenda of innovation and public service reform that will reduce the overall level of public spending
- We are committed to collaborative working with the private sector as the primary driver of economic growth and will work with them in establishing the economic priorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority
- All communities will benefit from growth, but not necessarily at the same time or in the same way

Annex: Thames Valley Devolution Evidence Base

Sectoral Complexity, Industrial Composition and Economic Geography



August 2025

Sectors and Economic Complexity

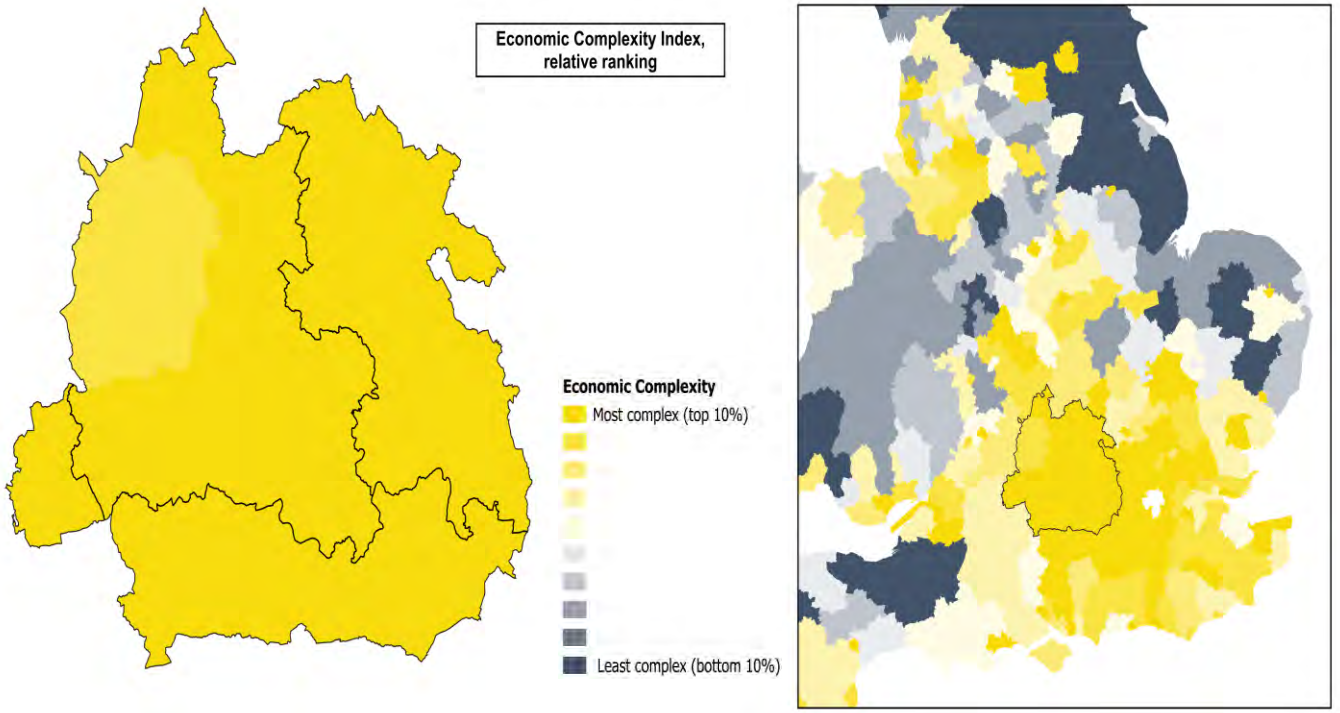
The Thames Valley does not currently function as an integrated economic area, but its constituents share many positives including equivalent economic complexity and sectoral composition

The evidence in this pack indicates that, while the Thames Valley does not currently operate as a fully integrated economic area, its constituent economies exhibit many shared positive - including comparable levels of economic performance, complexity, and advantageous sectoral complementarity

Economic complexity measures how advanced a local or national economy is in producing diverse, specialised activities. It is linked to high productivity and competitiveness and shows resilience and adaptability to market changes and technological progress.

The entire Thames Valley region is a highly complex economy, with all the area being in the top 20% most complex nationally. This is a level of complexity that is not seen by any of the existing Mayoral Strategic Authority areas.

Such complexity reflects not only the diversity of sectors present but also the depth of specialisation and interconnectivity between them. It suggests that the Thames Valley region is well positioned to absorb economic shocks, pivot towards emerging technologies, and sustain long-term growth.



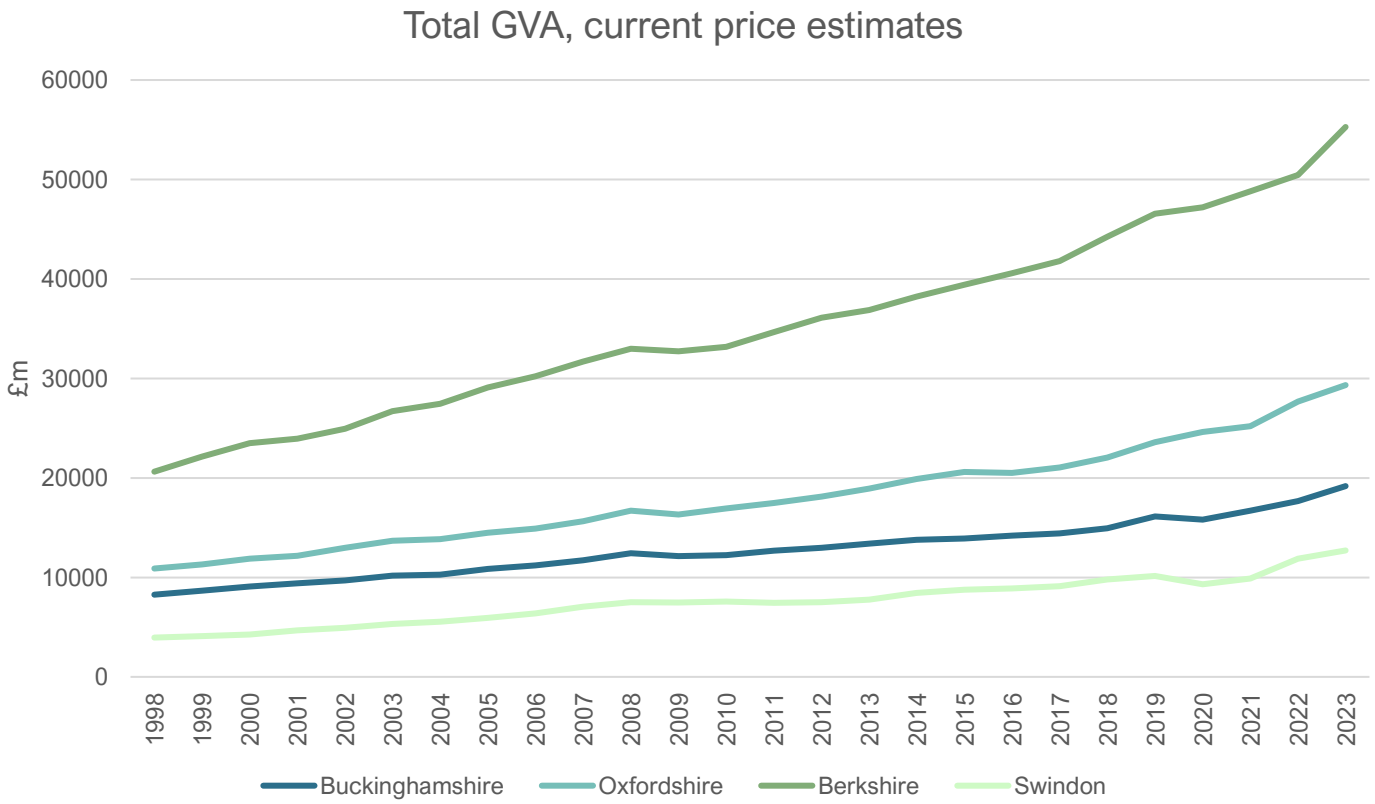
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS BRES 2025

Each Local Authority within the Thames Valley is a significant contributor to the national economy

The economies within the Thames Valley vary in total size. In 2023, Berkshire's GVA was £55bn, followed by Oxfordshire at £29bn, Buckinghamshire at £19bn, and Swindon at £12bn.

Between 1998 and 2023, GVA steadily increased across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Swindon, with all areas reaching their highest levels in 2023. Berkshire experienced the largest growth, rising by £34.6bn, with Oxfordshire (£18.4bn), Buckinghamshire (£10.9bn), and Swindon (£8.8bn) also showing consistent economic growth throughout the region.

Overall, the Thames Valley contributed £117bn to the English economy in 2023, representing 5% of the total economy, despite accounting for only 4% of the national population.

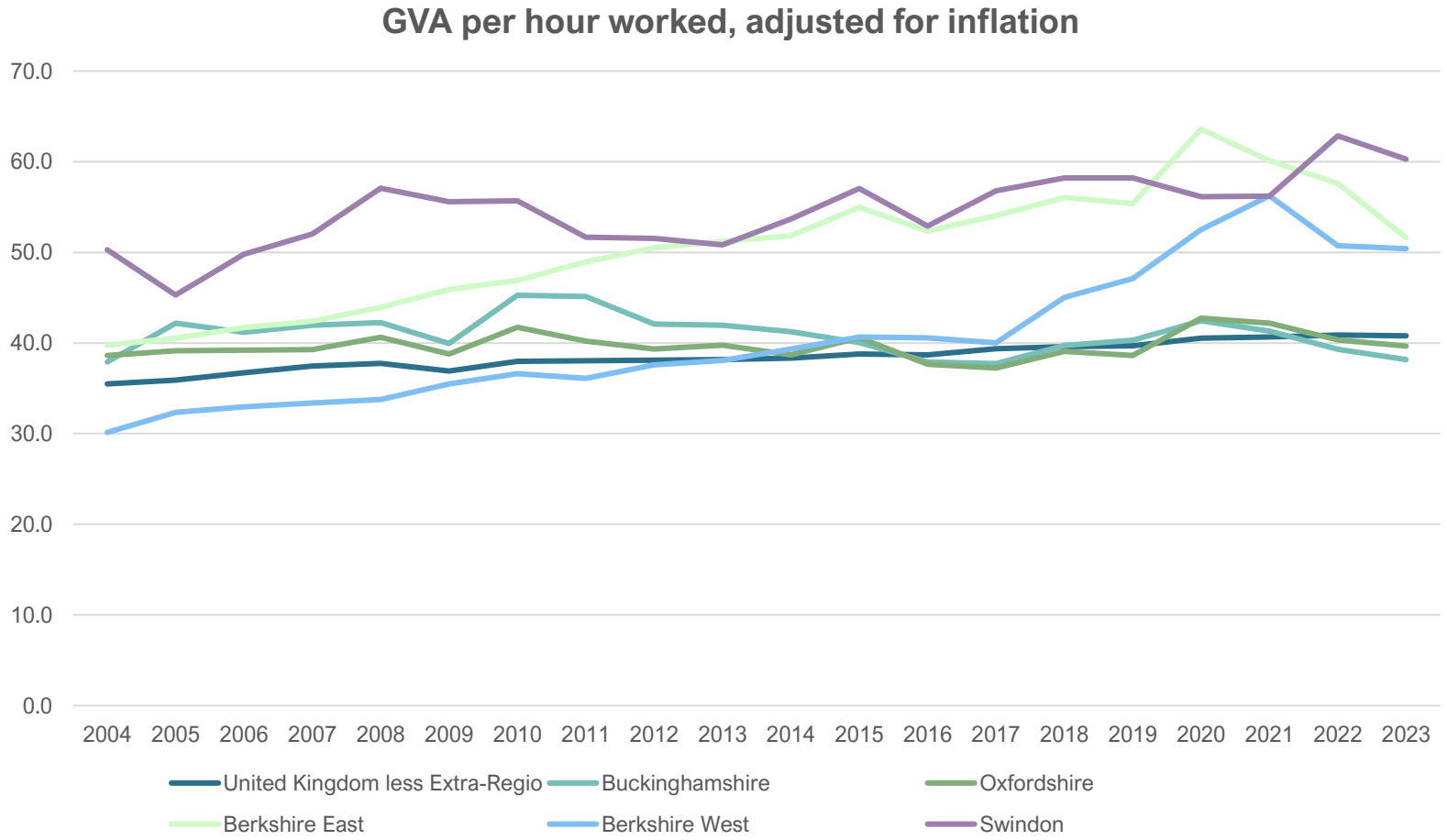


Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS, Regional GVA ITL3, 2025

Productivity across Thames Valley is generally high, above the national average

Productivity is a key underpinning factor for the prosperity of local economies, measuring how efficiently those economies are able to transform worker's efforts and raw materials into economic value.

Productivity is generally high in the Thames Valley; all constituent components of Thames Valley rank in the highest performing statistical areas of the UK for productivity

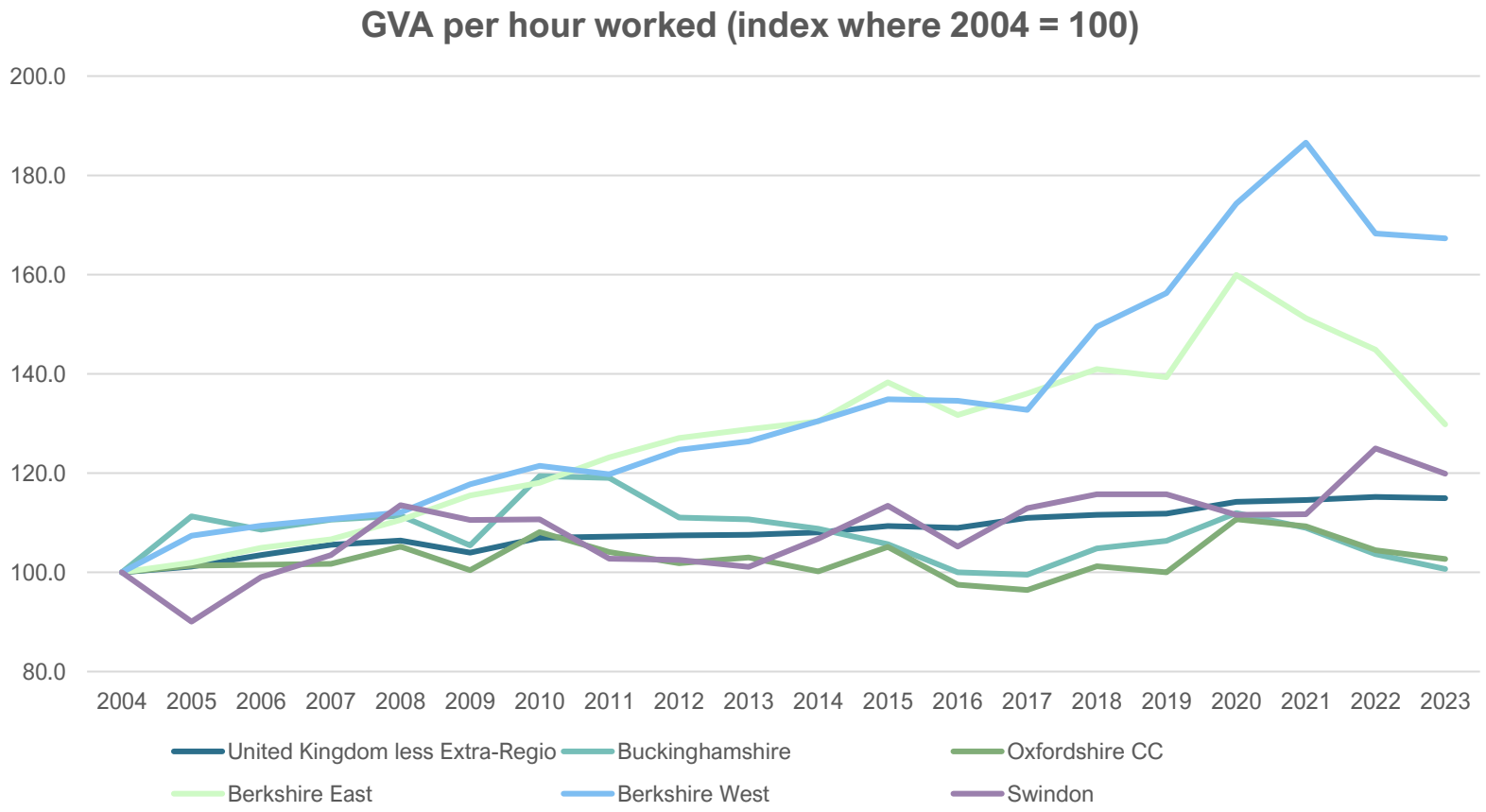


Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS, Regional GVA ITL3, 2025

Although growth trajectories have diverged in recent years

However, growth trajectories have diverged in recent years, with extremely strong productivity growth in Berkshire in particular.

Productivity growth in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire has been slower in recent years, particularly post-Covid, falling behind the national average. And there are also early indications that productivity growth in Berkshire may be slowing from the strong growth of the 2010s.



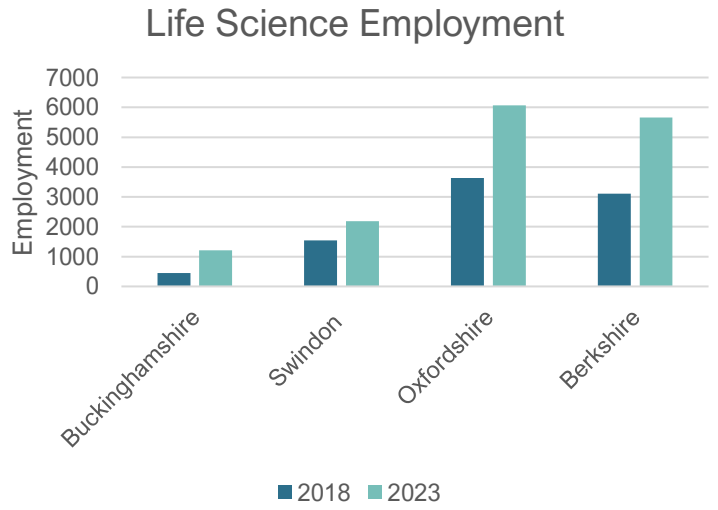
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Subregional productivity indices by local authority district, 2025

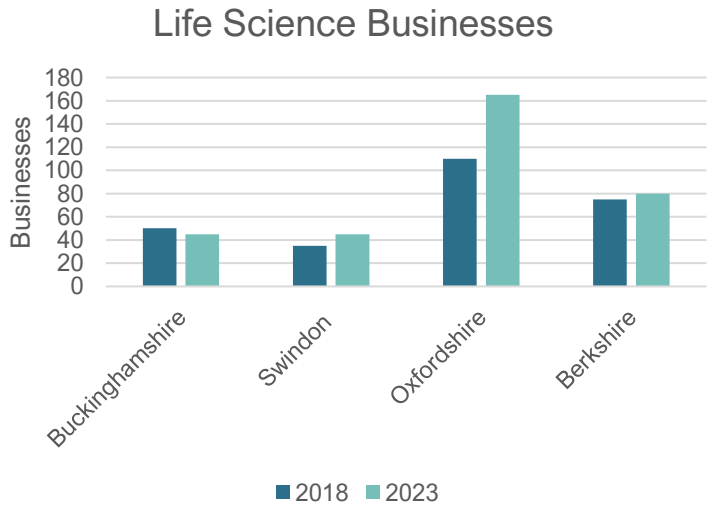
Life Sciences is a small but growing sector, particularly in Berkshire

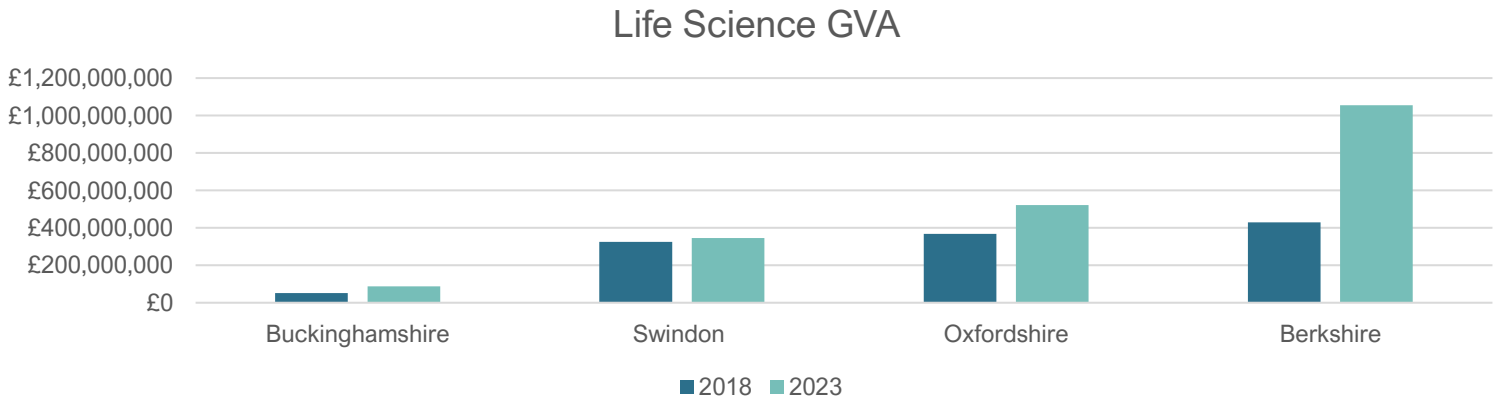
The Life Science sector, according to the Industrial Strategy, includes the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment, along with biotechnology research and drug development.

Life Sciences constitute a small portion of the Thames Valley economies, accounting for less than 2% of total employment.

Nevertheless, Berkshire has experienced growth in Life Sciences, with its GVA doubling between 2018 and 2023 to reach £1 billion.







Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025

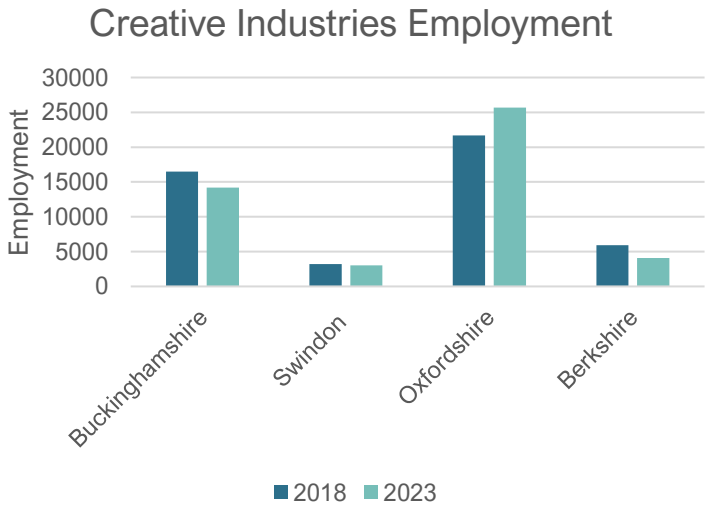
Creative Industries are significant part of both Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire's economies

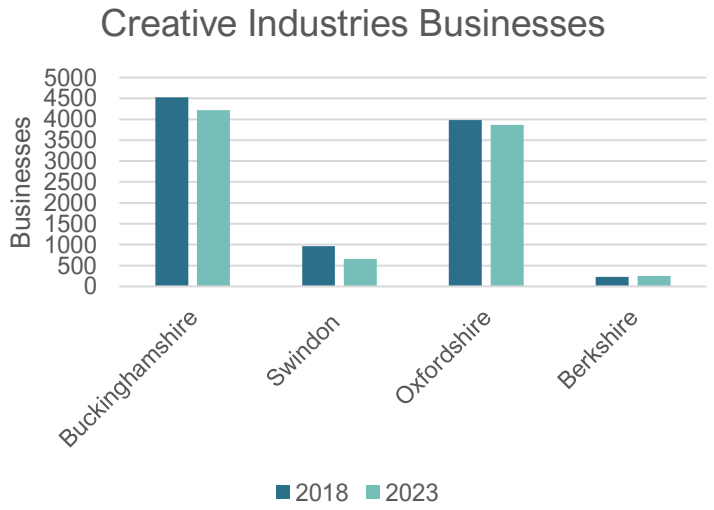
The sector encompasses a wide range of activities, including publishing, television, film and music production, performing arts, and museum operations.

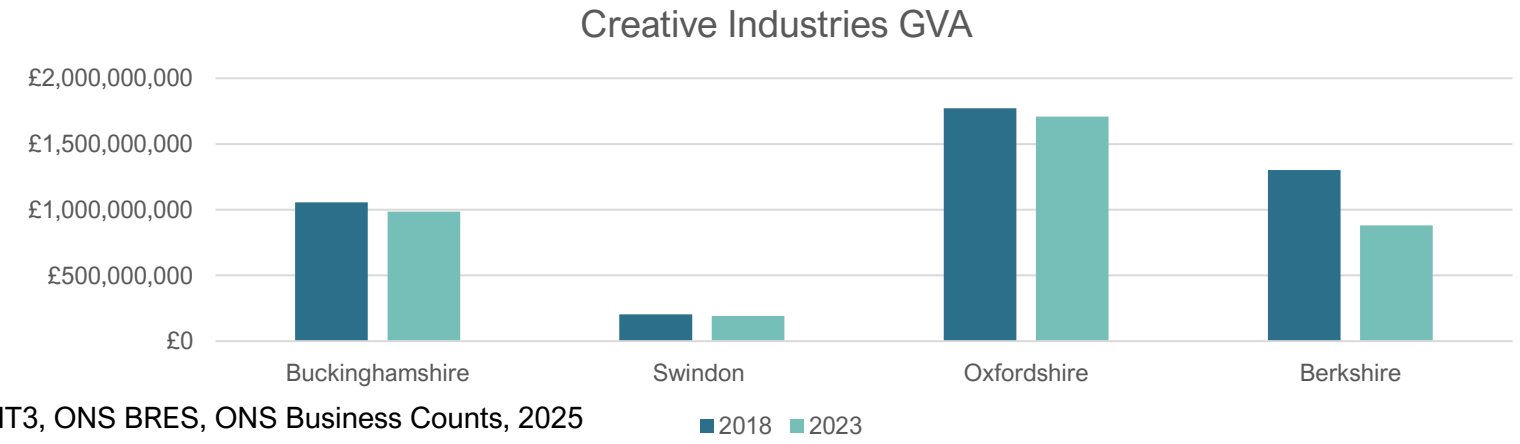
The creative industries hold particular importance for Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, accounting for 6% of total employment in each area.

In 2023, Buckinghamshire's creative industries generated £984 million for the national economy, ranking as the third largest IS-8 sector in terms of GVA.

Likewise, Oxfordshire's creative industries contributed £1.7 billion, also placing it as the third largest IS-8 sector by GVA.





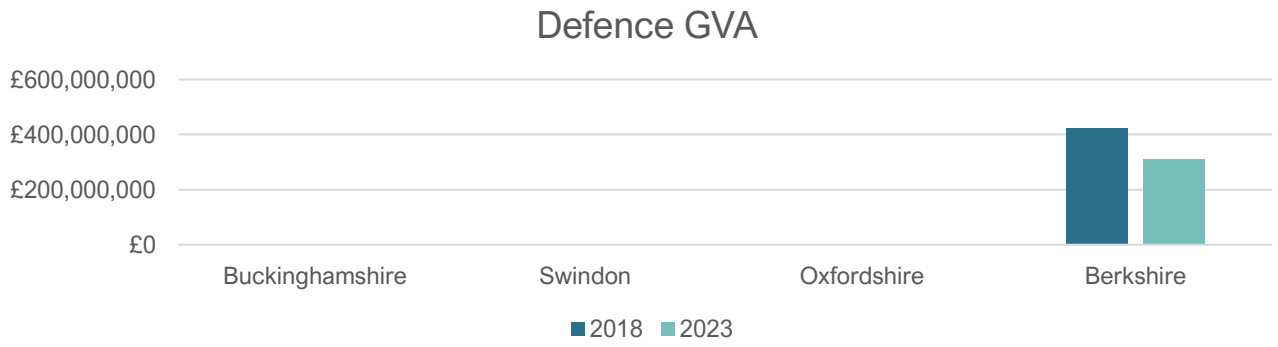


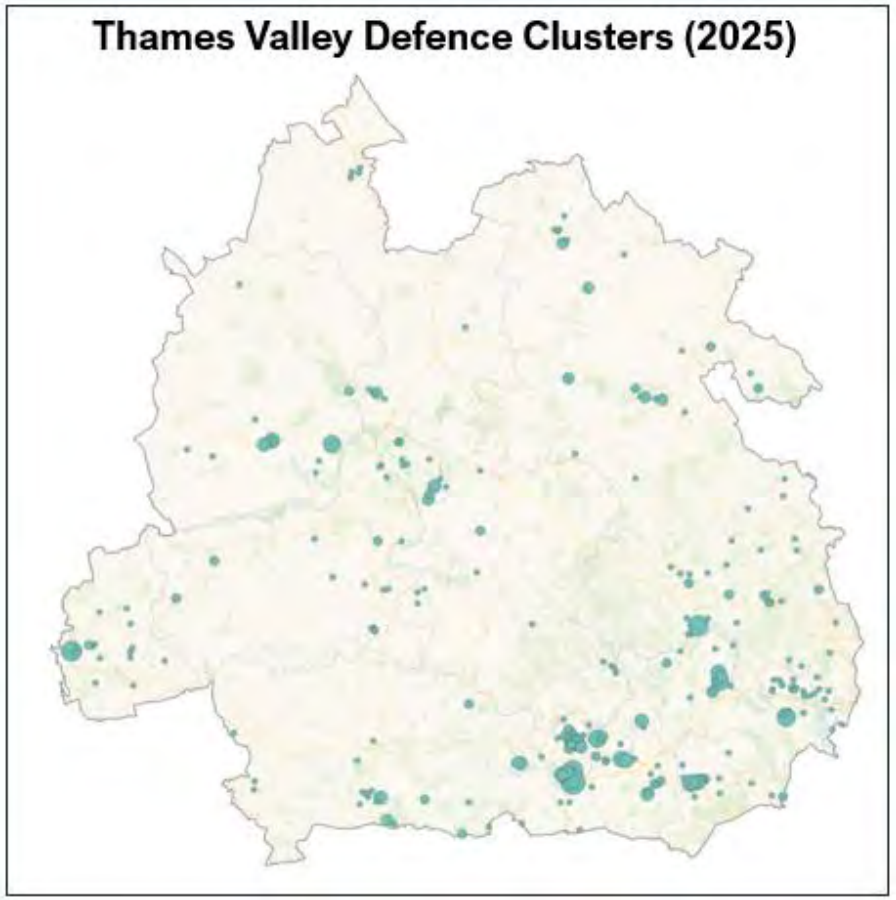
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025

ONS data does not show that the Thames Valley region has a specialism in Defence (manufacture)*

The Defence sector involves the production of weapons and military vehicles, as defined within the IS-8 sectoral framework.

Within the Thames Valley economy, Defence is not a significant component, with only Berkshire showing some employment in the sector; however, this accounts for just 1% of total employment in the area.





* The above analysis is based upon The Department for Business & Trade's SIC definition of the Defence sector; this definition narrowing includes only weapons and vehicles manufacture. DBT recognises that the SIC classification system is too restrictive to define the Defence sector, and that many relevant Defence activities, particularly around Cybersecurity, may be captured in other IS-8 sectors.

Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025, RTICS, Data City, 2025

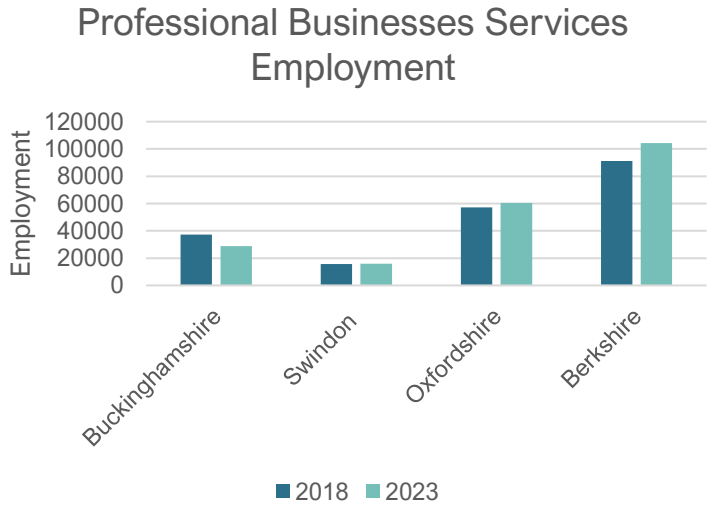
Professional Business Services is key to all Thames Valley economies, but Berkshire stands out for its national significance

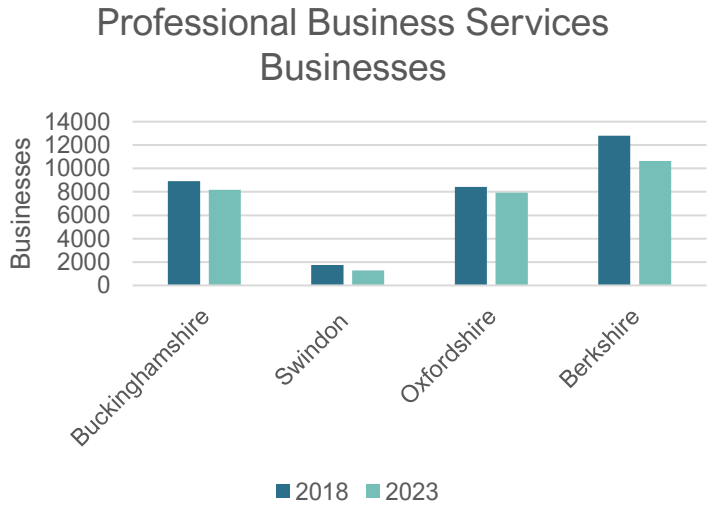
Within the IS-8 framework, Professional Business Services (PBS) include legal, accounting, consultancy, and specialist research services.

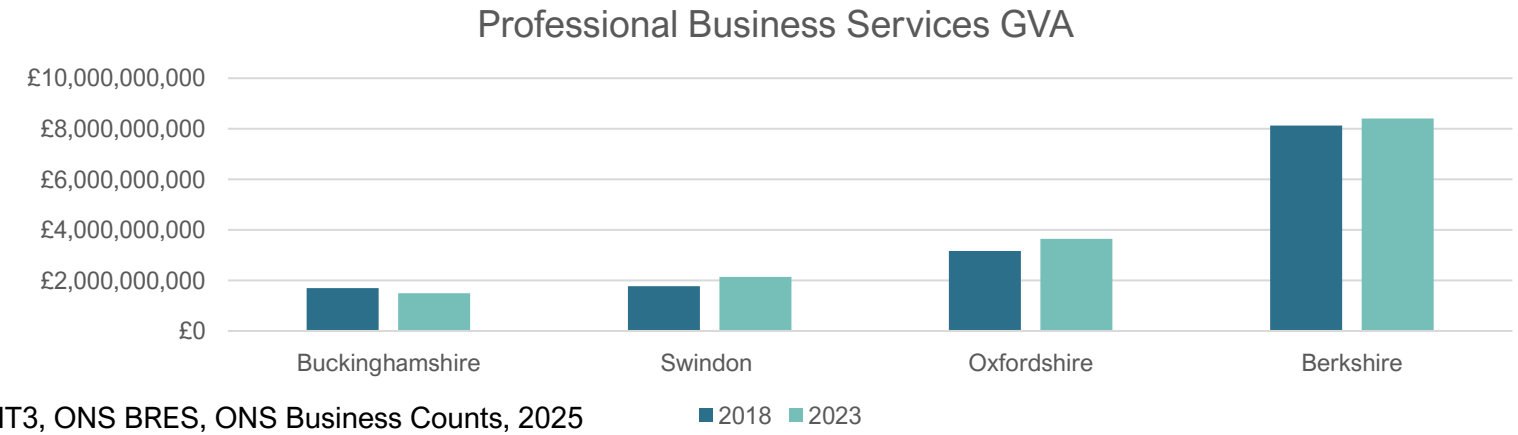
PBS plays a vital role in the Thames Valley economy, contributing significantly to the sector's national strength.

Regarding employment, PBS is the largest IS-8 sector across all Thames Valley local authorities, accounting for 11% to 19% of total jobs.

While PBS represents a substantial portion of employment and GVA in Buckinghamshire, Swindon, and Oxfordshire, its GVA in Berkshire stands out notably, reaching £8.4 billion in 2023.







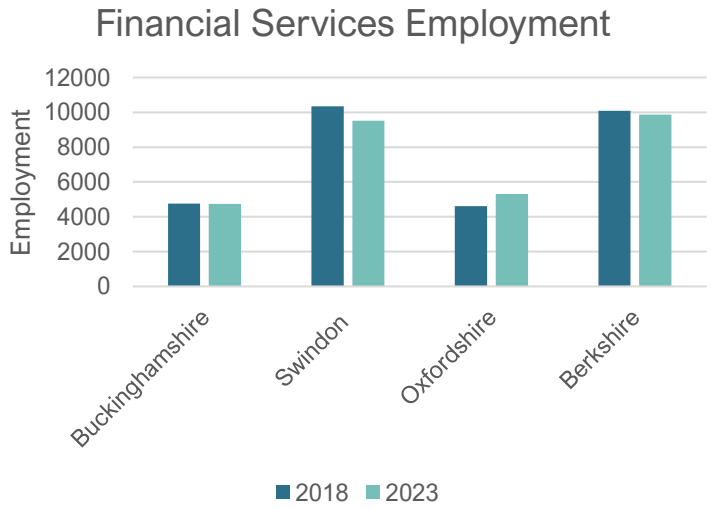
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025

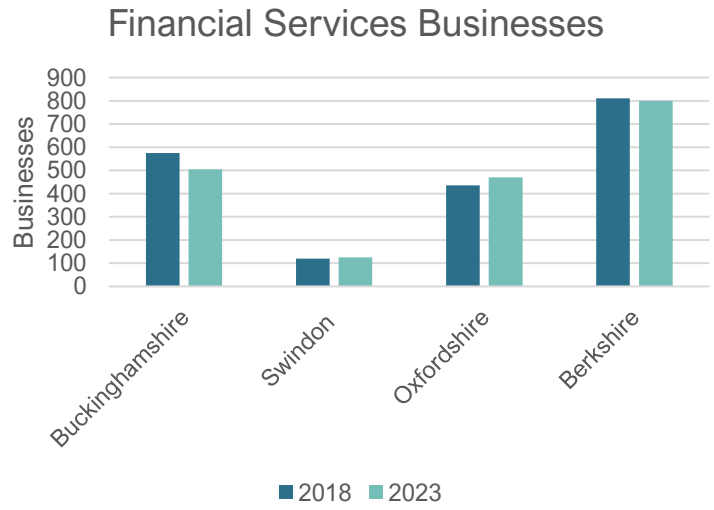
Swindon has a strong Finance sector relative to its economy's size

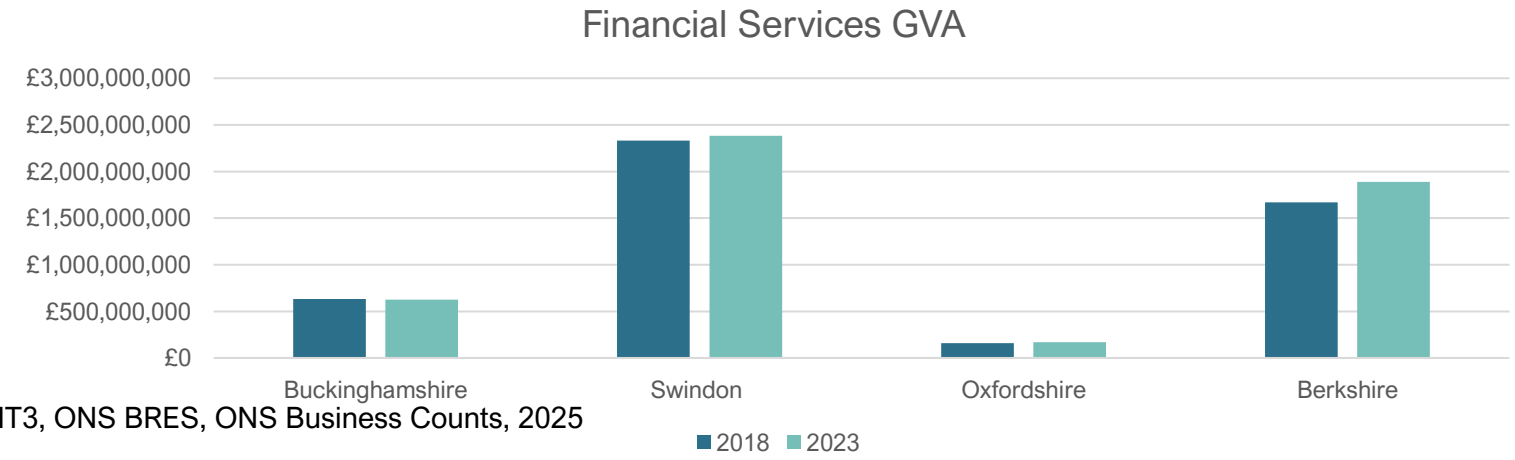
Financial Services encompass all activities related to insurance, investment, and banking.

The financial sector holds particular significance for Swindon, unlike the other three local authorities. While employment in this sector averaged around 2% across Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire, it accounted for 9% of jobs in Swindon in 2023.

In Swindon, the financial sector contributed £2.3 billion to the national economy, making up 29% of the authorities' total output across all IS-8 sectors.







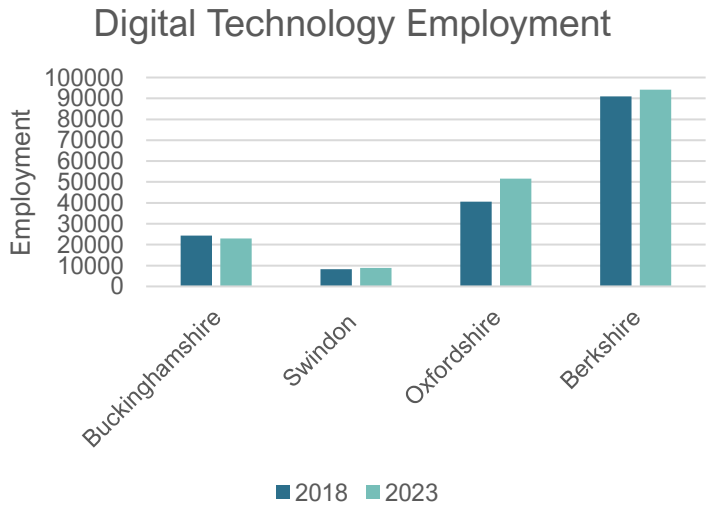
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025

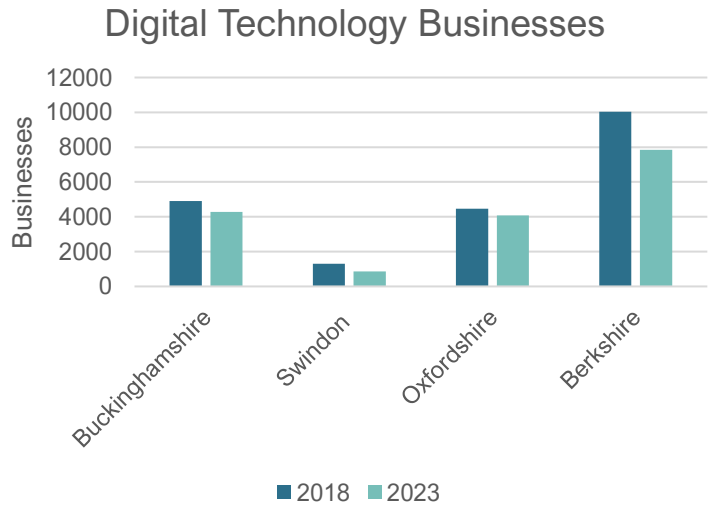
Berkshire has a nationally significant Digital Technologies strength that is not shared with other Thames Valley areas

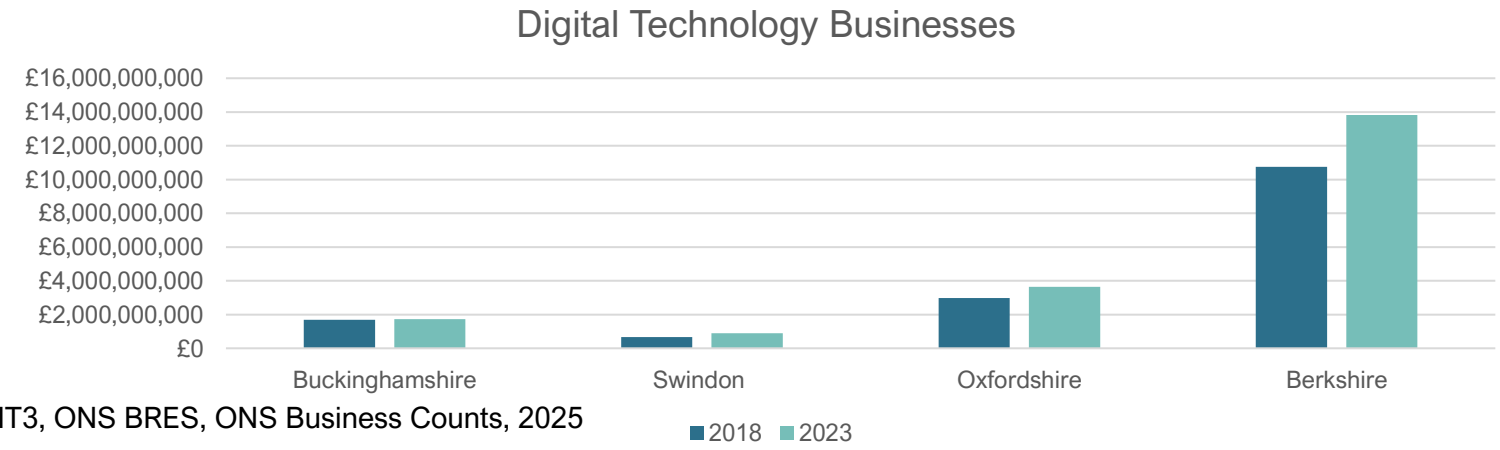
Within the IS-8 framework, Digital Technologies include the production of electronic products, computer consultancy, and software development.

In terms of employment, Digital Technologies account for 8% and 9% of total jobs in Swindon and Buckinghamshire respectively, while they represent 13% and 17% in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

However, despite Oxfordshire and Berkshire having similar proportions of total employment in the sector, there is a notable difference in their output contributions. In 2023, the GVA for Digital Technologies was £3.6 billion in Oxfordshire compared to £13.8 billion in Berkshire, indicating a level of output with national importance.







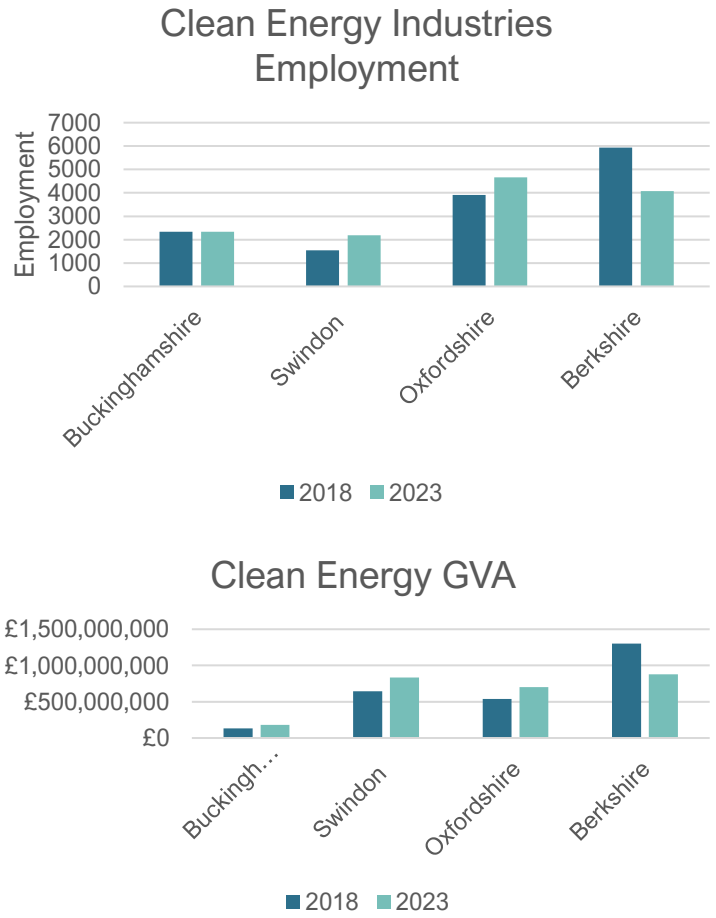
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025

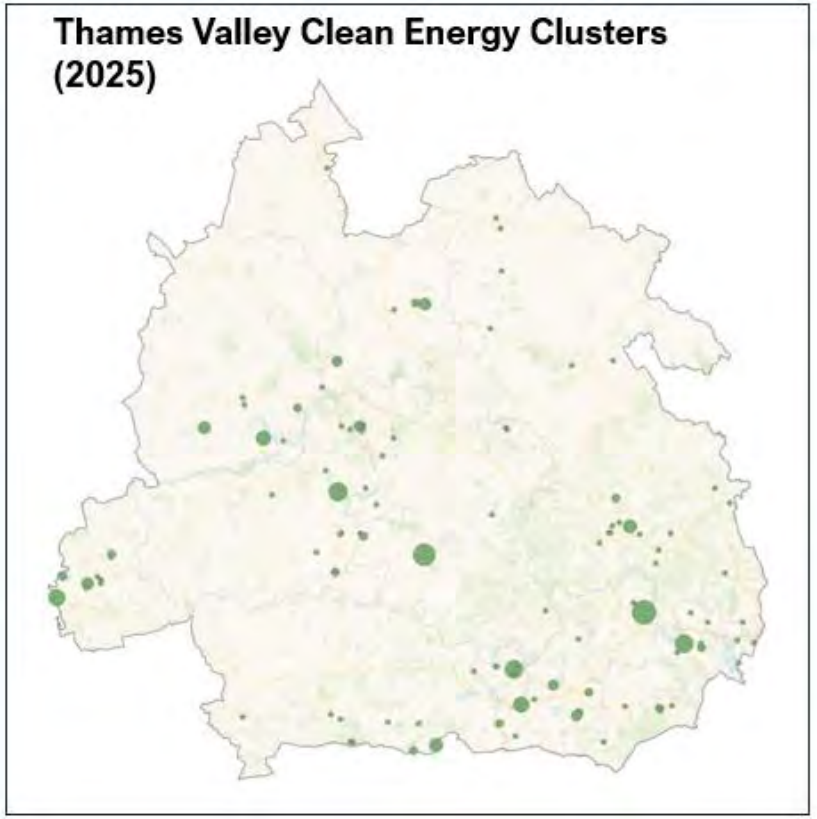
Clean Energy Industries are not significant in the Thames Valley

The Clean Energy Industries encompass the manufacturing of energy technologies, electricity generation, and waste management.

Despite this, they account for less than 2% of total employment in any Thames Valley local authority, indicating a relatively small workforce presence.

Nonetheless, the GVA figures suggest high productivity per employee, with Berkshire hosting the largest Clean Energy sector, contributing £879 million in GVA in 2023.





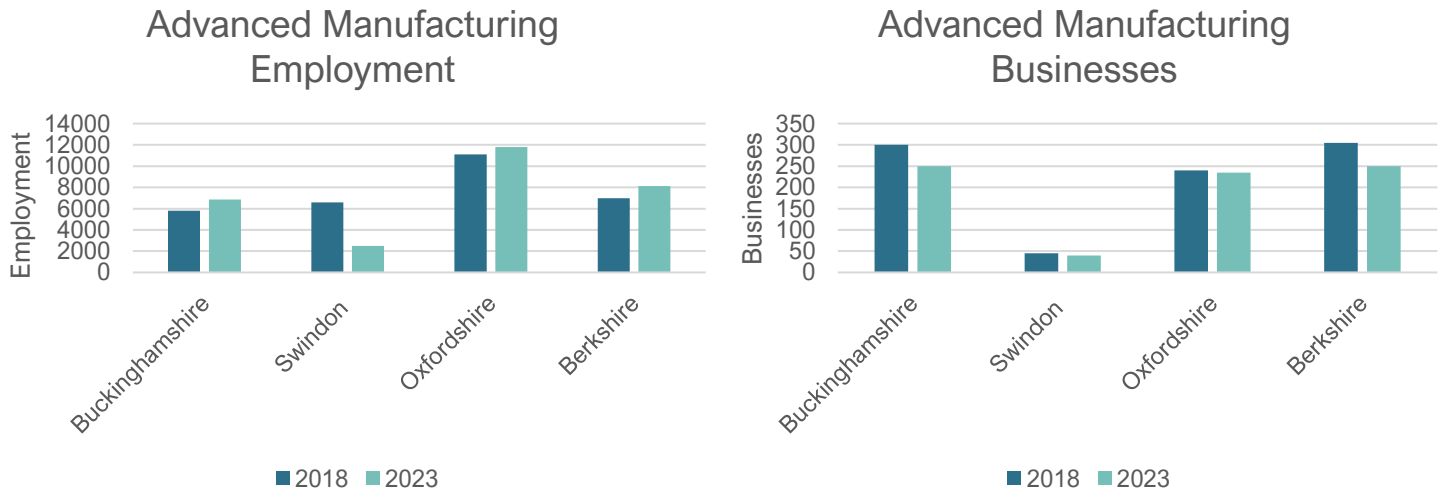
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025, RTICS, The Data City, 2025

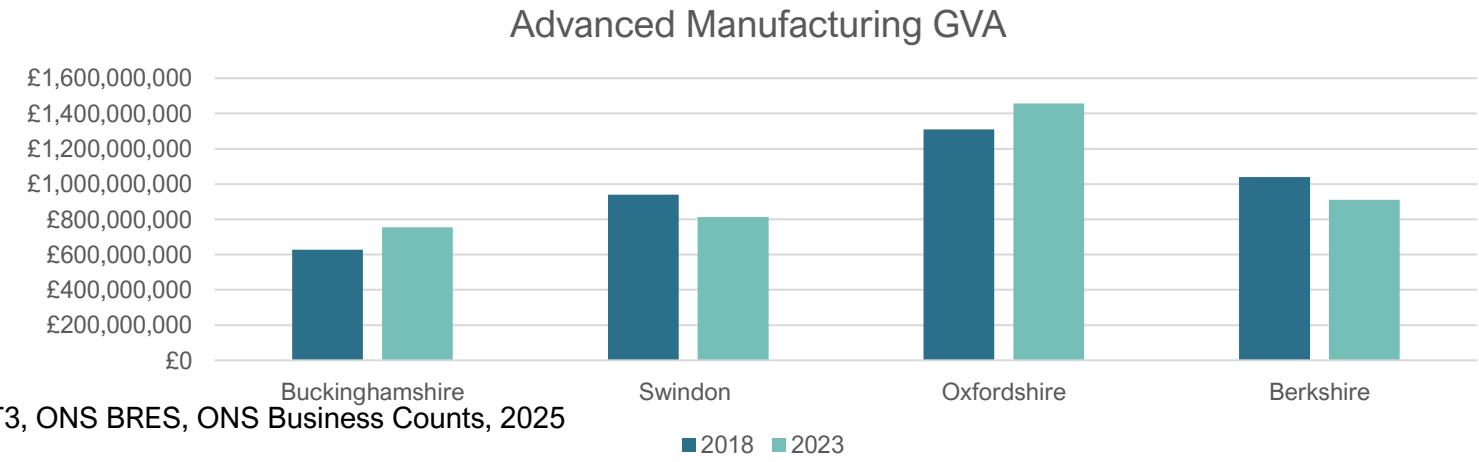
Advanced Manufacturing is represented similarly in each Thames Valley economy

Advanced Manufacturing encompasses most goods production, excluding low-value items like food processing and furniture.

In each Thames Valley local authority, Advanced Manufacturing accounts for a small share of total employment, approximately 2.5%.

The GVA contribution is fairly consistent across the local authorities, with Buckinghamshire contributing the least at £753 million in 2023 and Oxfordshire the most at £1.45 billion.





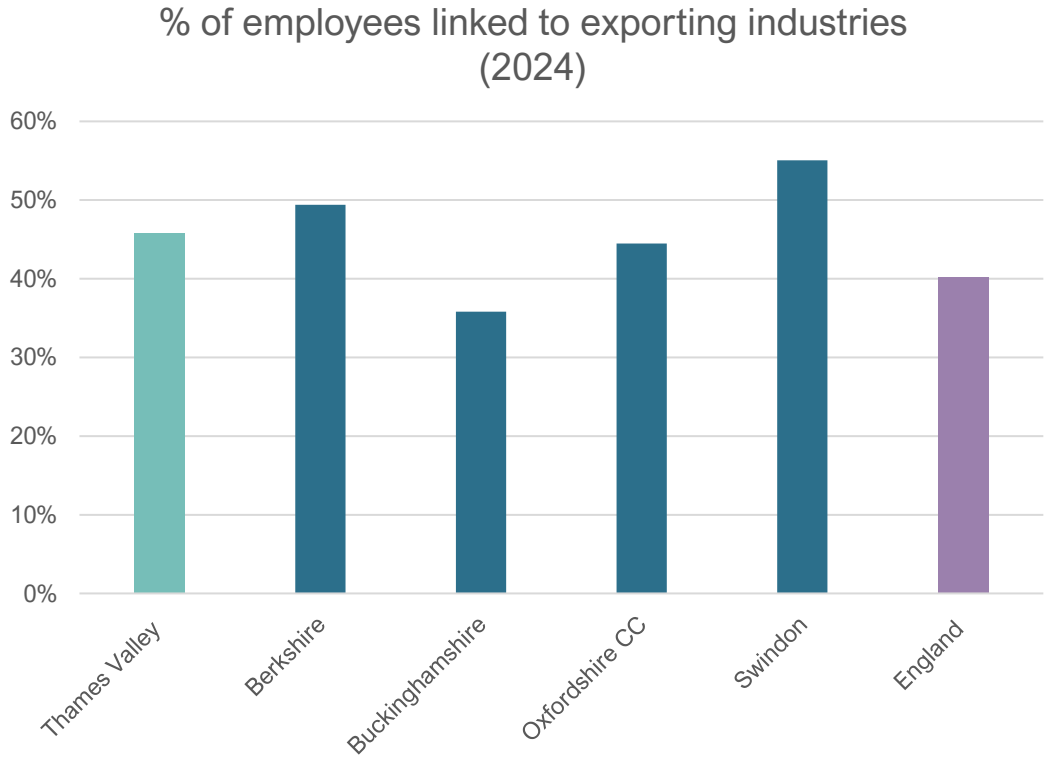
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional GVA IT3, ONS BRES, ONS Business Counts, 2025

The Thames Valley region has a positive surplus on exports, with strong potential for international linkages to drive growth

Each constituent authority in the Thames Valley region demonstrates economic strength, especially in services exports, with surpluses ranging from £1.6 billion to £7 billion in 2023.

In 2024, 46% of employees in the Thames Valley were associated with exporting industries, surpassing the national average of 40%. Among the areas, only Buckinghamshire fell below the national figure with 36%, whereas Berkshire and Swindon stood out with notably higher proportions of 49% and 55% respectively.

A high proportion of employees engaged in exporting industries reflects a region's ability to compete in global markets, signalling robust production capabilities and international demand for its goods and services. This not only brings in external revenue but also fosters innovation, investment, and productivity improvements. The fact that Berkshire and Swindon exceed the national average by a notable margin suggests these areas are key drivers of regional economic dynamism. Moreover, reliance on export-oriented sectors implies a degree of economic diversification and resilience, reducing vulnerability to domestic market fluctuations and enhancing long-term growth prospects.

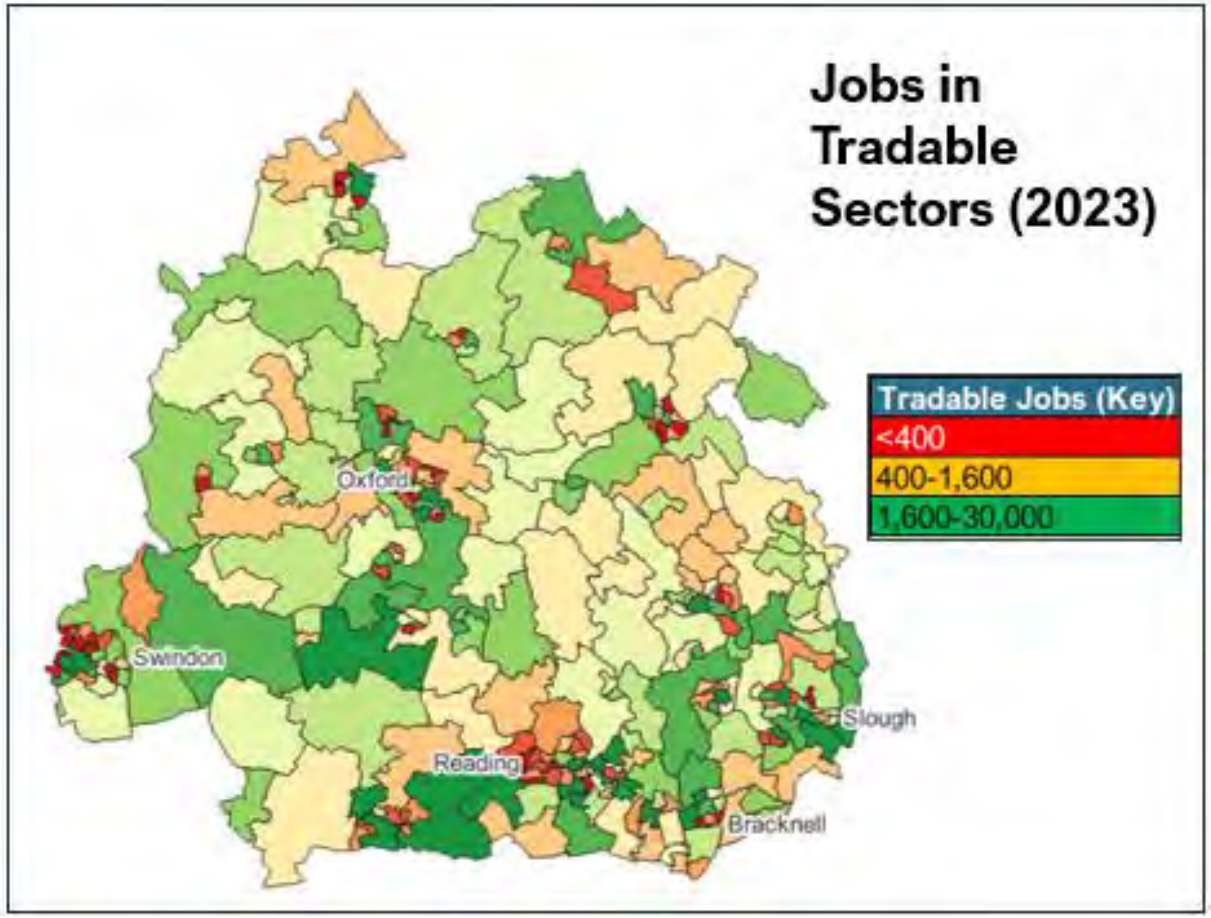


Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of HMRC 2024, ONS, Subnational trade in services, 2025

The Thames Valley shows a high proportion of employment in sectors that are tradeable indicating high growth potential

Employment in tradable sectors, which produce goods and services that can be exchanged beyond the local area, plays a crucial role in boosting productivity and fostering economic growth. This is because growth and pricing are not confined by local market constraints, and businesses tend to innovate more when facing greater competition.

The Thames Valley region has a larger share of jobs in tradable sectors compared to the national average, with 39% versus 36%, and significantly higher than the regional average of 33%. However, this varies among local authorities; Buckinghamshire accounts for 33%, while Berkshire is closer to 45%. This indicates that although the Thames Valley as a whole benefits from a strong presence of tradable sector employment, differences at the local level could affect the overall productivity and growth potential of the region. Berkshire's higher proportion (around 45%) establishes it as a major contributor to innovation and competitiveness on a broader scale, whereas Buckinghamshire's lower figure (33%) suggests a more locally focused economy with fewer companies engaged in national or international markets.



Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS BRES, 2025

Economic Geography

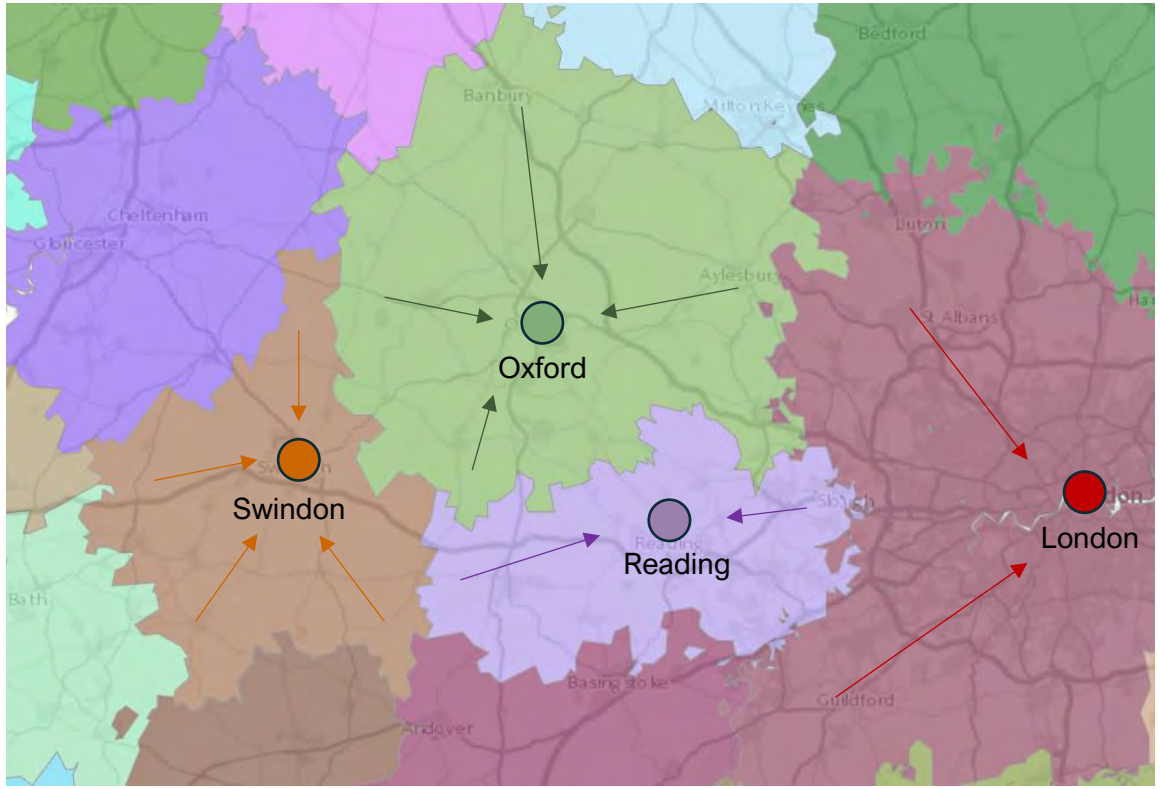
High skill travel to work demonstrate clear differentiation from the Greater London economy

High-skill travel to work areas are a form of analysis building on the 2011 Census (data collection issues with the 2021 Census means they have yet to be replicated). Leading economic thinktanks like the Centre for Cities prefer their use over general travel to work areas as they more closely align with the high-skill, high-value work which tends to support growth in innovative and frontier sectors.

In the Thames Valley, high-skill travel to work areas show clear differentiation with the Greater London high-skill travel to work area, suggesting that these regions are economically significant centres of production outside of their relationship with the capital.

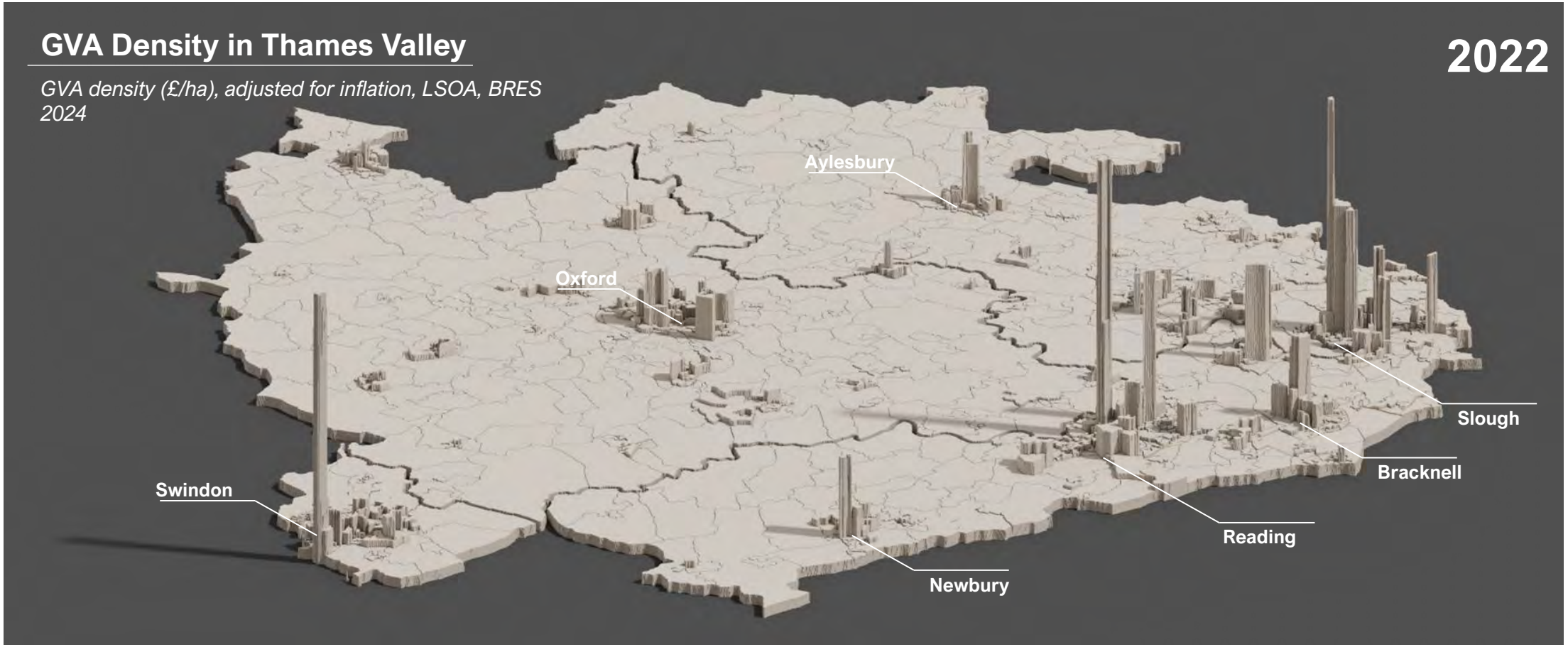
They also demonstrate three distinct travel-to-work areas within Thames Valley; one based on Oxford, one based on Reading, and a third based on Swindon. This highlights the economic gravity of Thames Valley cities to high-skilled workers - a contrast to neighbouring areas like Surrey and Hertfordshire, where such workers typically commute beyond local boundaries into the London labour market.

Figure: high-skill travel-to work areas in the Thames Valley



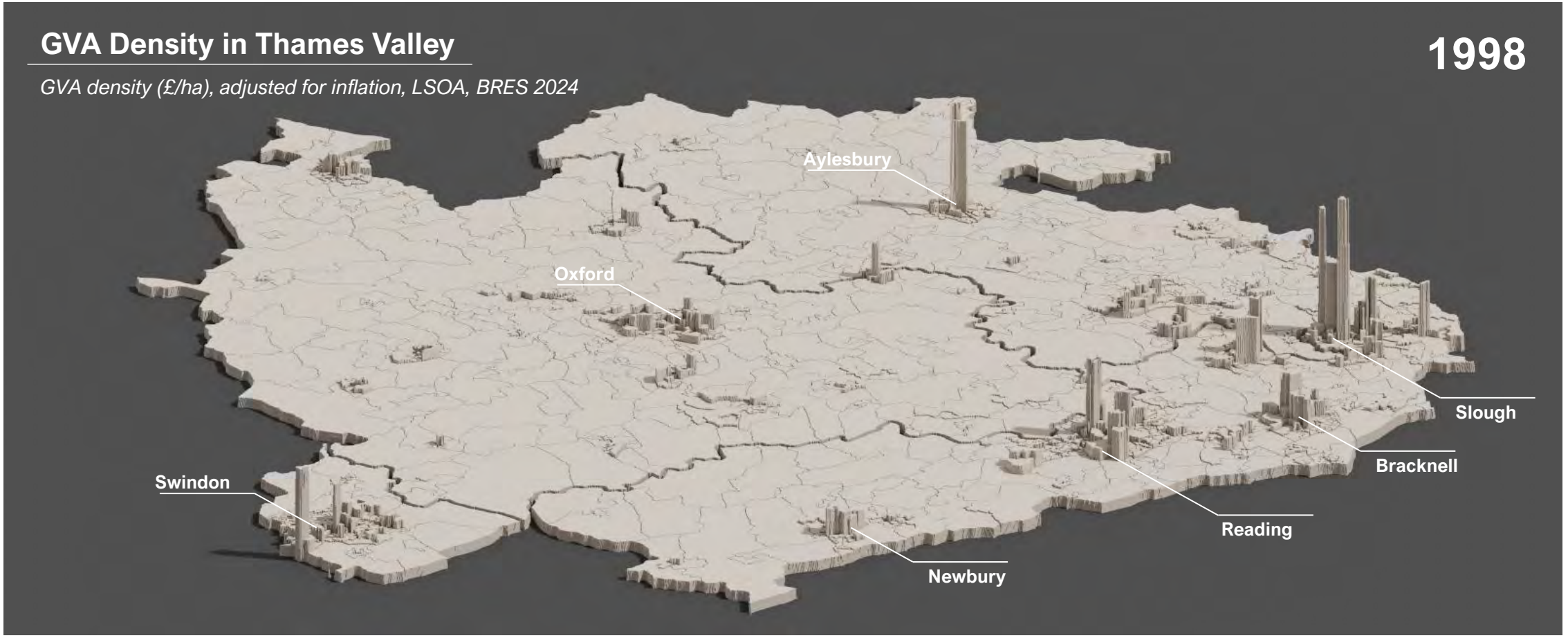
Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of Census 2021

Thames Valley is a polycentric economy with several key concentrations of economic activity



Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Sub-regional GVA, 2025

And it has seen significant growth over the last two decades, although with differentiated pictures across the study area

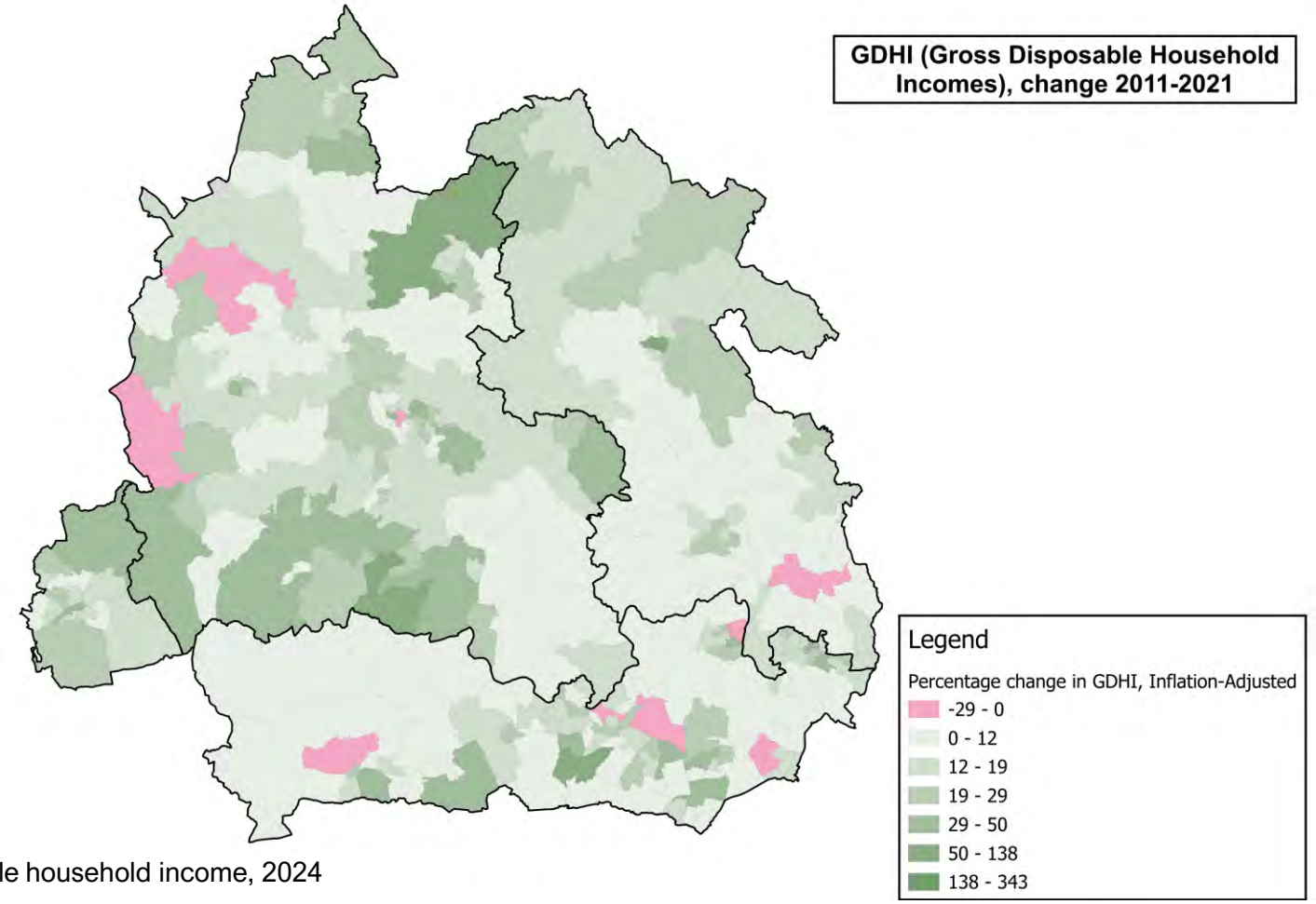


Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Sub-regional GVA, 2025

Incomes in the Thames Valley have seen rapid growth in recent years, in line with GVA growth

Incomes across Thames Valley have been showing strong growth in recent years relative to the national average, with particularly strong growth in household incomes in Oxfordshire, Swindon, and in Berkshire. This is in line with the strong GVA and productivity growth demonstrated by places within the Thames Valley.

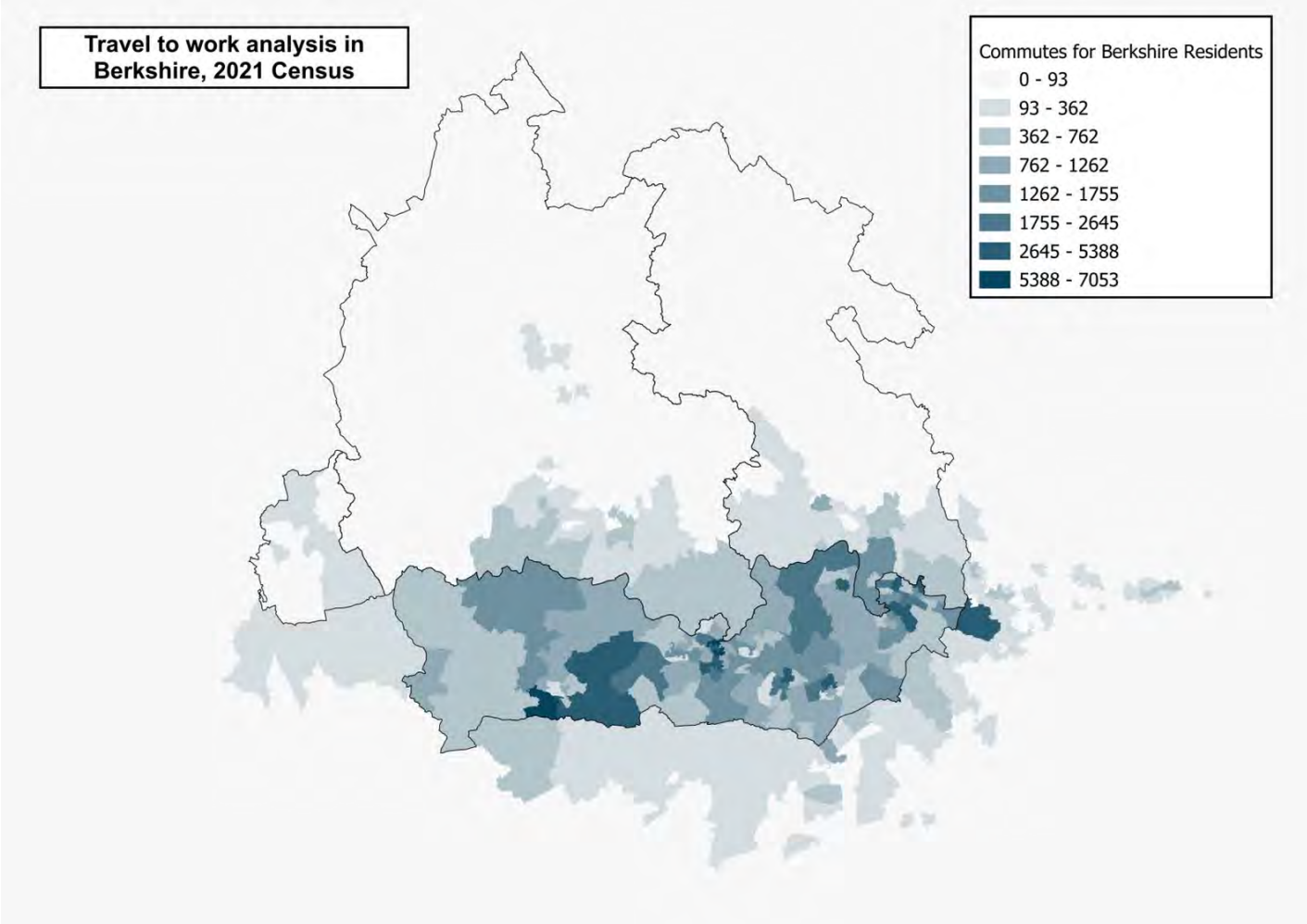
This growth contributes substantial additional tax revenue to the exchequer, and contributes to rising living standards locally



Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of ONS Regional gross disposable household income, 2024

Berkshire has strong linkages into South Bucks, South Oxfordshire and London

Based on 2021 travel-to-work statistics, Berkshire's labour market is largely self-contained along the M4, with few commutes extending beyond its boundaries. The small amount of out commuting generally heads south towards Basingstoke and southeast towards Surrey. There is minimal indication of a significant labour market connection with Swindon or Oxfordshire, though a moderate link exists with Buckinghamshire, particularly near High Wycombe.

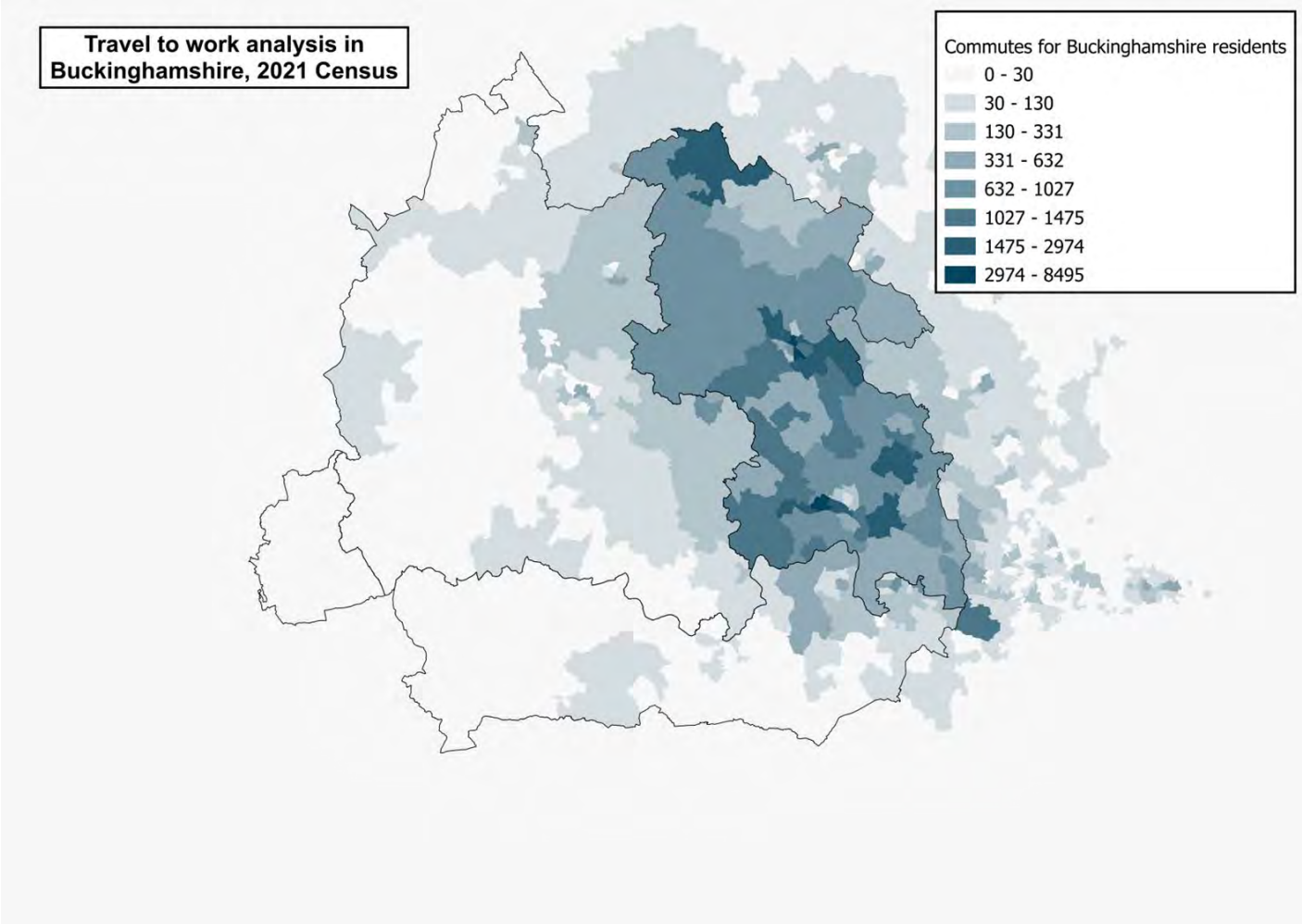


Please note: Analysis of the 2021 Census will tend to under-weight high skill travel to work areas due to remote work during the pandemic, so should be used in conjunction with travel to work analysis from the 2011 Census

Buckinghamshire has strong linkages into East Oxfordshire, North Berkshire, and West and Central London

Buckinghamshire's labour market covers a broader area than Berkshire's, with commuting patterns extending east toward Cherwell and west toward Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

In contrast, Buckinghamshire has minimal connections with Swindon and West Berkshire.

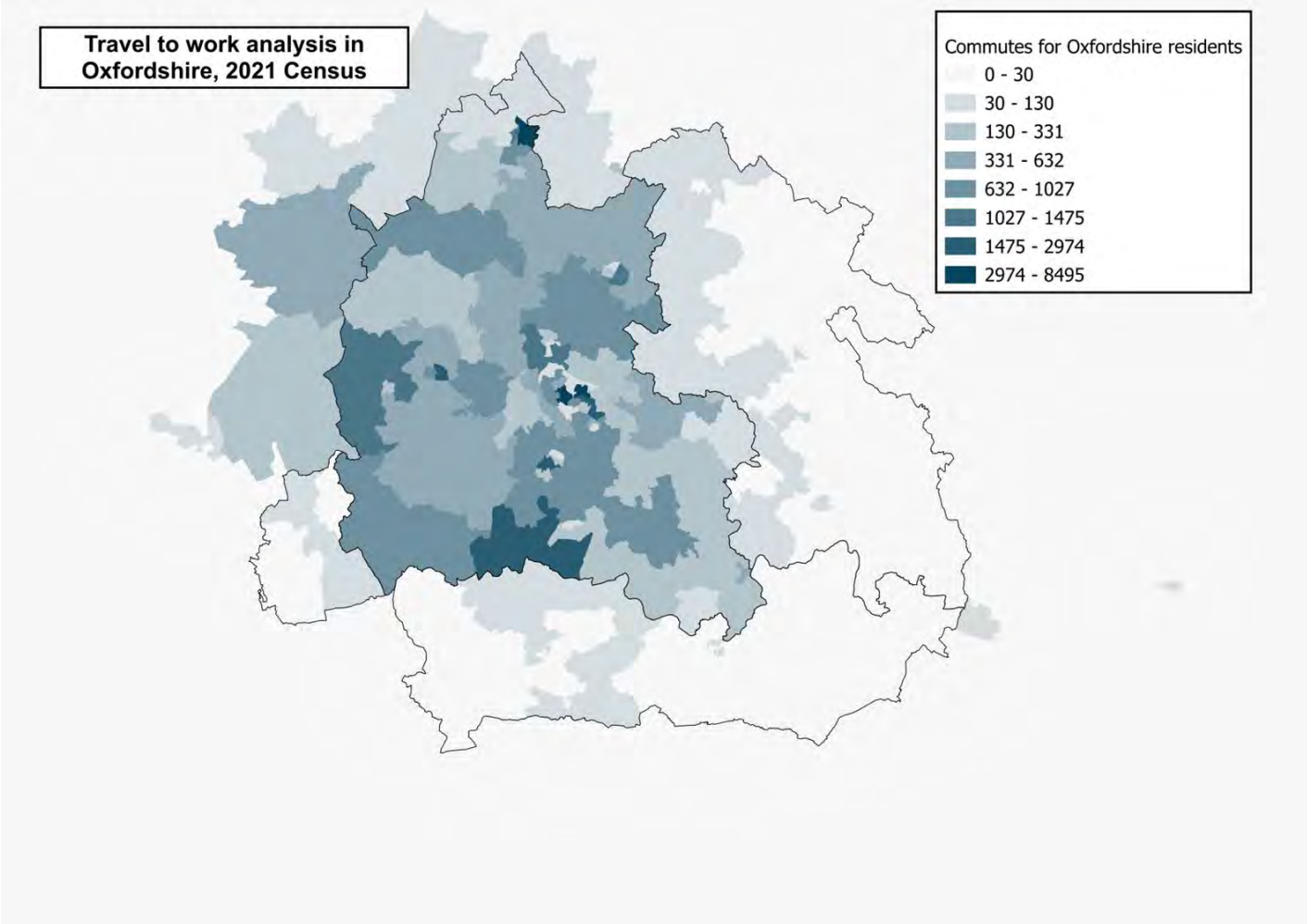


Please note: Analysis of the 2021 Census will tend to under-weight high skill travel to work areas due to remote work during the pandemic, so should be used in conjunction with travel to work analysis from the 2011 Census

Oxfordshire is relatively self contained, with strong concentrations of commutes on the city of Oxford

Oxfordshire is a relatively self contained economy, with stronger commuting into the city of Oxford from elsewhere in the authority area.

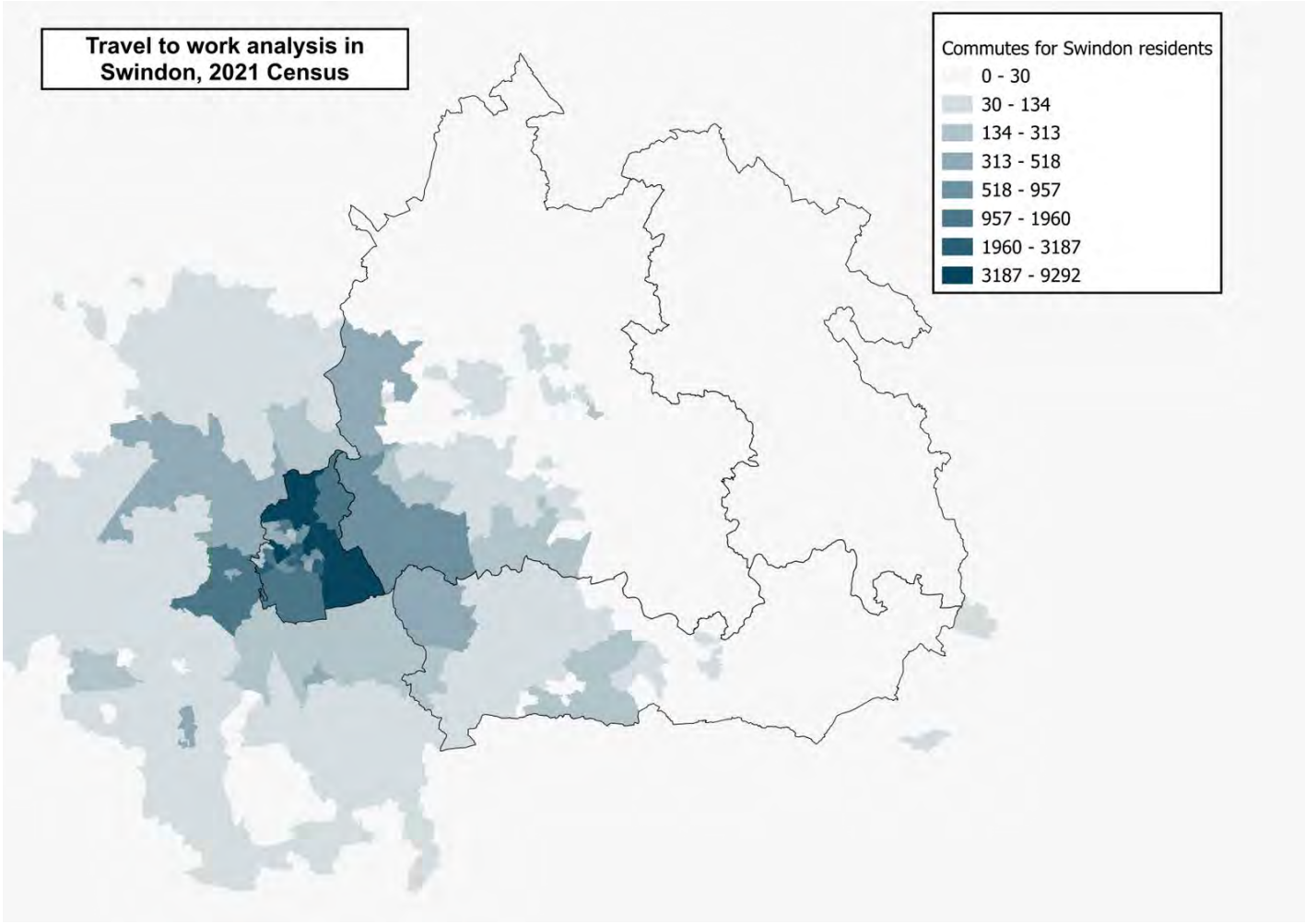
However, Oxfordshire has stronger labour market connections with the Cotswolds than it does with the other regions in the Thames Valley region.



Please note: Analysis of the 2021 Census will tend to under-weight high skill travel to work areas due to remote work during the pandemic, so should be used in conjunction with travel to work analysis from the 2011 Census

Swindon is relatively economically self contained, with a strong concentration of work on the city of Swindon

Swindon's labour market is primarily centred within the city but extends westward into Wiltshire and the Cotswolds. Due to this westward commuting trend, there is little indication of significant labour market connections with other authorities in the Thames Valley area, aside from those directly adjacent, such as West Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.



Please note: Analysis of the 2021 Census will tend to under-weight high skill travel to work areas due to remote work during the pandemic, so should be used in conjunction with travel to work analysis from the 2011 Census

Travel time data suggest scope for further integration of major population and employment centres, to drive economic growth

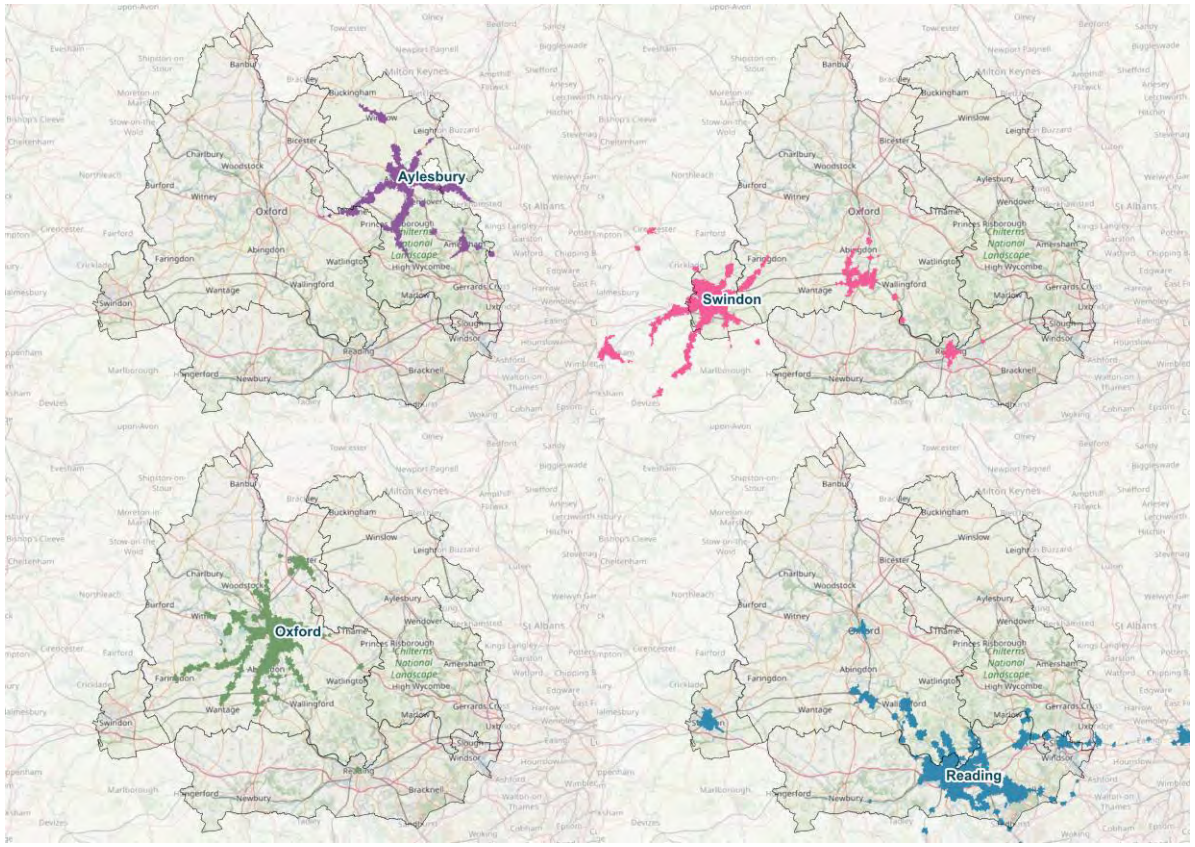
Travel times in Thames Valley via public transport are generally high, although connections are strong between the major population centres, as the figure overleaf demonstrates.

In particular, the overlaps in current travel time are generally stronger in the south and west of Thames Valley; Swindon and Reading are each reachable within 60minutes of each other on public transport and have coverage of portions of Oxfordshire; although connections to Oxford itself are more limited, suggesting an opportunity for better integration of intra-urban labour markets.

Connections between Buckinghamshire and major population centres, on the other hand, are more limited.

Given the strong sectoral complementarity and shared emphasis on tradable high-skill jobs, there is an opportunity for an MSA to foster agglomeration by investing in targeted hard and soft infrastructure across the Thames Valley. Strengthening economic connectivity among the region's constituent economies can enhance their complexity and build resilience against future disruptions caused by external shocks or trends.

Figure: Travel Time Analysis of major economic centres within Thames Valley



Source: Metro Dynamics analysis of Travel Time API

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Appendix 3

One Oxfordshire financial case and options appraisal (2025)

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

One Oxfordshire Financial Case and Options Appraisal

Contents

This document explains the inputs and assumptions behind the detailed financial case for a One Oxfordshire unitary authority and provides a summary of the anticipated benefits for the residents of Oxfordshire.

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Executive Summary: Overview of Costs and Savings

Introduction and Overview

The analysis in this document explains the assumptions behind the One Oxfordshire Financial Case. This has been developed independently by PwC who have extensive experience in public sector change, including LGR and major service transformation. PwC used their evidence base to model a top-down review of potential costs and benefits and assess the reasonableness of the draft financial considerations. Challenge and assurance have been provided by an independent person who was previously the Section 151 Officer for a council that successfully went through a successful transition to become a unitary authority.

By Year 5 a **One Oxfordshire unitary council** is estimated to realise **£30.1m** in recurring savings from reorganisation plus **£33.2m** recurring savings from transformation.

Costs for reorganisation and transformation are:

1. **Combining (or aggregating) existing services**: the cost associated with merging the services of six councils, as well as the commissioning and procurement of new systems to cover the Oxfordshire footprint.
2. **Transformation:** staffing, project and ICT costs needed to transform service provision.

Benefits of One Oxfordshire:

1. **Economies of scale**: larger authorities are able to deliver services more efficiently through shared infrastructure, procurement advantages and consolidated back-office functions.
2. **Reduced management structures:** simplifying the governance model results in recurring savings from fewer senior posts and decision-making layers.
3. **Transformation following reorganisation:** reorganisation would primarily look to amalgamate services but would not at that stage involve the detailed service improvement that may realise benefits from optimised operations, digitisation and automation. There are expected to be significant benefits in addition to reorganisation which could be pursued under the new authority.

Reorganisation Savings (on-going)

Reorganisation savings achieved through aggregation include:

- **Staffing (Leadership):** Savings from reduction in leadership team costs.
- **Staffing (Delivery):** Savings from reduction in roles needed.
- **Third Party Spend (third party spend):** Savings from reduction in addressable spend across all in-scope contract categories.
- **Democracy:** Savings from reduction in election costs and member allowances.
- **Property:** Savings from reduced property operational expenditure for rationalised assets.

Reorganisation Savings £m					
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Total Reorganisation Savings	**12.0**	**24.1**	**30.1**	**30.1**	**30.1**

Phasing					
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Reorganisation savings profile (recurring)	**40%**	**80%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Staffing Savings		Oxfordshire (£m)
Estimated senior leadership structures saving	Recurring	7.5
Estimated front office staffing aggregation saving	Recurring	5.8
Estimated service delivery staffing aggregation saving	Recurring	3.5
Estimated back office staffing aggregation saving	Recurring	3.6
Total Staffing Benefit (See page 26)	Recurring	**20.4**
Third Party Spend Savings		
Total third party spend aggregation saving (See page 33)	Recurring	4.2
Democracy Savings		
Estimated Councillor allowances & Special Responsibility Allowance Saving (Page 40)	Recurring	1.1
Estimated Election Cost Savings (See page 40)	Recurring	1.0
Property Savings		
Total Property Savings (not including capital receipts from disposal of assets, operational expenditure only) (See page 50) (*)	Recurring	3.4
Total reorganisation Savings	**Recurring**	**30.1**

(*) in addition to this there would also be estimated one – off capital receipts of £11.4m (see page 49)

Transition Costs (one – off)

Transition costs (one - off) include:

- **New unitary setup & closedown costs:** Spend to design the new structure and manage the change (e.g. training, comms, process redesign).
- **IT & Systems costs:** Spend on new or upgraded systems to support a single organisation (e.g. finance, Human Resources, Customer Relationship Management).
- **External transition, design and implementation support costs:** Resources needed to run the transformation programme (e.g. project management, governance).
- **Redundancy Costs:** Payments and support for staff reductions due to structural changes. This has been uplifted.
- **Contingency:** A buffer for unexpected costs, reflecting risk and complexity.

Transition Costs £m						
	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Transition Costs (one – off)	-8.8	-8.8	-4.3	£0	£0	£0

Phasing						
	Year 0	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Transition costs	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%	0%

One off transition / reorganisation costs	Total (£m)	Note
Programme Management Costs ● External communications, rebranding & implementation ● Internal programme management:	**2.7**	Internal programme management costs plus external communications and marketing spend.
Shadow Democratic and Legal Costs ● Creating the new council ● Closedown of existing councils ● Public Consultation ● Shadow Chief Executive Costs	**1.8**	Legal activities linked to creating the new council creation and closing down the previous councils, public consultation, rebranding and communications ahead of vesting day, and shadow member and executive costs. Based on previous LGR experience.
IT & Systems Costs	**5.2**	Costs of data migration, systems migration, setting up new systems from scratch , hardware costs, integrating business systems etc. Based on previous LGR experience.
External transition, design and implementation support costs	**4.1**	Service design for consolidated teams, analysing and amalgamating like services during reorganisation, assessing demand and matching appropriate infrastructure.
Redundancy costs	**6.1**	Redundancy cost as a proportion of salary (current assumption) x total FTE saving
Contingency	**2.0**	Estimated 10% of total one - off transition / implementation cost
TOTAL	**21.9**	

Combined Transition Costs and Reorganisation Savings

This takes into account:

- **Reorganisation savings**
- **One-off transition costs**

There is a net cost of £8.8m in Year 0, due to transition spend, followed by strong and rising net in year benefit from Year 1 onwards.

While transition costs will be repaid through reorganisation savings, Oxfordshire County Council has already committed £10m from earmarked reserves, which can be used towards the cost of local government reform and devolution. It is expected that the year 0 transition cost of £8.8m will be met from this reserve with the remaining £1.2m available to support devolution. Therefore, it is expected that recurring savings will start in year one.

Reorganisation Savings and Transition Costs £m							
	Year 0	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Total 5 year Saving (+) / Costs (-)**
Total Reorganisation Benefits	0	12.0	24.1	30.1	30.1	30.1	**126.4**
Total Transition Costs	-8.8	-8.8	-4.3	0	0	0	**-21.9**
Net in year Saving (+) / Cost (-)	**-8.8**	**3.2**	**19.8**	**30.1**	**30.1**	**30.1**	**104.5**

Phasing						
	Year 0	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**
Reorganisation benefits (recurring)	**0%**	**40%**	**80%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
Transition costs (one-off)	**40%**	**40%**	**20%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**

The payback period for a One Oxfordshire would be approximately 1.3 years or within 2 years of vesting day

Investment in Transformation

The scale and scope of transformation will need to be decided by the new local council, including the anticipated upfront costs and benefits phasing. However, estimated costs including delivery resource, investment and redundancy costs are summarised below.

Investment Cost

- Transformation typically requires a degree of upfront spend, particularly in delivery resource (change management, service redesign specialists, business architecture development) and investments in tools and technology.
- There may be opportunities for the organisation to leverage reorganisation delivery resource to support transformation, thereby dampening the total additional investment needed. Costs may be further reduced depending on existing in-house transformation capability and capacity.

Phasing

- Transformation costs are typically expected to be phased across the first 2 years of a programme, with the bulk of upfront assessment, design and implementation work being complete prior to significant benefit realisation.
- Since the new authority will also be working through reorganisation, a more conservative phasing timeline has been applied to transformation savings realisation so these are later.

Cost Category	Estimated Cost (£m)
Delivery Resource	6.9
Additional Investment Costs (e.g. IT and Software)	5.5
Redundancy Costs (set at 30% of staff benefit, in line with County Council Network (CCN) reorganisation assumptions)	2.7
Contingency Cost (10% of delivery resource and additional investment cost)	1.5
Total Transformation Costs (one – off)	**16.6**

Transformation Costs, Savings & Phasing

In the longer run the scope of transformation savings would be a decision for the new council. Estimated costs and savings for transformation are shown below.

The benefits of reorganisation have already been taken into account and removed from the baseline costs.

Transformation Savings			
Saving Area	**Oxfordshire Baseline (£m)**	**Assumed Saving %**	**One Oxfordshire Saving (£m)**
Front office employee spend	90.6	3.0%	2.7
Service delivery employee spend	95.6	3.0%	2.9
Back office employee spend	68.7	5.0%	3.4
Third party expenditure	602.3	3.5%	21.0
Income generation	209.2	1.0%	2.1
Assets – running costs	22.7	5.0%	1.1
Total			**33.2**

Combined Transformation Costs and Savings £m						
	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**	**Total**
Transformation Saving (£m)	0	0	16.6	24.9	33.2	**74.7**
Transformation Cost (£m)	-6.6	-6.6	-1.7	-1.7	0	**-16.6**
In-year Net Saving (+) / Costs (-)	**-6.6**	**-6.6**	**14.9**	**23.2**	**33.2**	**58.1**

Phasing					
	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5**
Transformation Saving	0%	0%	50%	75%	100%
Transformation Cost	40%	40%	10%	10%	0%

Recurring Reorganisation & Transformation Savings

Saving Area	One Oxfordshire Recurring Savings by Year 5			Savings with Stretch Transformation (see page 56)	
	Reorganisation Savings £m	Transformation Savings £m	Total Savings £m	Stretch Transformation Savings £m	Total Savings £m
Senior Management	7.5	n/a	7.5	n/a	7.5
Front Office FTE	5.8	2.7	8.5	2.7	8.5
Service Delivery FTE	3.5	2.9	6.4	2.9	6.4
Back Office FTE	3.6	3.4	7.0	4.8	8.4
Third Party Spend	4.2	21.0	25.3	27.0	31.2
Democracy	2.1	n/a	2.1	n/a	2.1
Income Generation	n/a	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1
Operational Assets	3.4	1.1	4.5	1.1	4.5
Total	**30.1**	**33.2**	**63.3**	**40.6**	**70.7**

Combined Costs & Savings (Reorganisation & Transformation)

A single council for Oxfordshire is estimated to deliver recurring reorganisation savings of £12.0m in year 1 (2028/29) rising to **£30.1m** from year 3 (2030/31) onwards. These savings would be supported by one off transition costs of **£21.9m**. Total net savings by year 5 would be **£104.5m.**

In addition, transformation savings of **£33.2m** are expected to be achievable from year 5 onwards with one-off costs to deliver these of **£16.6m**.

Therefore, recurring savings will total **£63.3m** by Year 5.

Total net savings after reorganisation and transformation costs are expected to be £162.6m by year 5.

One Oxfordshire							
	Year 0	**Year 1**	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**	**Year 5 onwards**	**Total 5 year Savings (+) / Costs (-)**
	£m	**£m**	**£m**	**£m**	**£m**	**£m**	**£m**
reorganisation Savings	0	12.0	24.1	30.1	30.1	30.1	**126.4**
Transition Costs	-8.8	-8.8	-4.3	0	0	0	**-21.9**
Net Cost (-) /Saving (+)	**-8.8**	**3.2**	**19.8**	**30.1**	**30.1**	**30.1**	**104.5**
Transformation Savings	0	0	0	16.6	24.9	33.2	**74.7**
Transformation Costs	0	-6.6	-6.6	-1.7	-1.7	0	**-16.6**
Net Cost (-) /Saving (+)	**0**	**-6.6**	**-6.6**	**14.9**	**23.2**	**33.2**	**58.1**
Total Cost (-) / Saving (+)	**-8.8**	**-3.4**	**13.2**	**45.0**	**53.3**	**63.3**	**162.6**

Planned Revenue Expenditure & Funding

Inputs: Planned Revenue Expenditure

The planned revenue expenditure for each of the existing councils in Oxfordshire has been combined to provide the cost base for a single unitary council.

This is needed to:

- Provide a clear, consistent view of net operating expenditure.
- Show how current net operating expenditure would be aggregated.

The analysis does **not** forecast changes in statutory requirements or new cost pressures beyond those already included in the MTFS for each council.

Assumptions
Net operating expenditure is derived from the Medium Term Financial Strategy for each council.
The model does not include the impact of any savings that would be required to balance budgets in future years.

Inputs: Planned Revenue Expenditure

This table shows the planned net operating expenditure for each of the existing councils in Oxfordshire from 2025/26 through to 2027/28, along with the link to the source documents.

Council	2025/26 (£'000)	2026/27 (£'000)	2027/28 (£'000)	Source	Note used
Cherwell District Council	26,194	28,147	30,004	MTFS	Net Budget Requirement
Oxford City Council	27,259	33,271	34,016	MTFS	Net Budget Requirement
West Oxfordshire District Council	18,231	18,717	21,474	MTFS	Target Budget
South Oxfordshire District Council	17,867	17,389	20,484	MTFP	Net Expenditure
Vale of White Horse District Council	19,746	21,509	23,092	MTFP	Net Expenditure
Oxfordshire County Council	709,312	740,283	777,515	MTFS	Net Operating Budget w/o Budget Shortfall
Net Operating Budget (Aggregated Budget for One Oxfordshire)	**818,609**	**859,316**	**906,585**		

Inputs: Oxfordshire County Council Net Revenue Expenditure

The table shows projected net revenue expenditure for Oxfordshire County Council broken down by service area based on the MTFS agreed in February 2025.

Service Areas	2025/26 (£'000)	2026/27 (£'000)	2027/28 (£'000)
Adult Social Care (ASC)	254,486	269,493	286,623
Children's Social Care (CSC)	216,650	222,507	234,843
Environment & Highways	53,033	54,374	58,398
Economy & Place	21,235	17,998	18,044
Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Services and Community Safety	30,626	31,559	32,142
Public Health & Communities	12,960	13,572	13,560
Resources and Law & Governance	62,364	61,357	62,912
Transformation, Digital & Customer Experience	6,596	6,763	6,862
Total Service Area Budgets	657,950	677,623	713,384
Strategic Measures (Corporate Budgets)	38,166	49,664	51,135
Contributions to / from Reserves	13,196	12,996	12,996
Budget Shortfall	0	-2,089	-4,815
Net Operating Budget (including budget shortfall)	709,312	738,194*	772,700**

* £740,283 excluding budget shortfall.
** £777,515 excluding budget shortfall.

Overview of General Revenue Funding

Overview

From vesting day, One Oxfordshire will receive funding that was previously allocated to the legacy authorities.

The new council would need to decide how to harmonise differences in council tax levels across the existing councils. This will impact on the amounts paid by residents and the funding received by the new unitary.

The following categories of income have been considered to provide a view of the financial position of the One Oxfordshire Unitary Authority in Year 1.

Categories of Income	Description	Sources
Business Rates	Local share of Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) retained by the council after redistribution plus top-up/tariff adjustments and grant funding to offset the impact of business rates reliefs.	Latest publicly available MTFS (February 2025) or updated forecasts provided by local authority on Objective Connect
Council Tax	Income from local residents based on property valuations and bandings, used to fund local services.	
Grant Funding	Aggregated government grants within the Aggregate External Finance (AEF) system, such as Revenue Support Grant, and non-ringfenced grants.	

Oxfordshire Context

- Each Council presents their MTFS in a slightly different way, but broadly the figures reconcile to a consistent income position.
  - **South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils**: Business rate figures are presented as growth against baseline and show comparatively lower figures. This is, however, balanced out through the greater flow through from grant income.
  - **Oxfordshire County Council:** Council Tax Surpluses (estimated at £8m in 2026/27 and 2027/28) are included as a separate recurring line in the MTFS and this funding has been included in total Council Tax Income figures.
- Some councils have taken into account the estimated future impact of the anticipated Business Rates Reset from 2026/27 as part of their 2025/26 MTFS. Where that has made a material difference, they have provided updated figures and forecasts that exclude the impact.
  - **Cherwell District Council** has provided revised figures not in the MTFS that dampens the impact of the reset.

Inputs: Estimated Revenue Grant Income and General Funding

The following shows estimated Business Rate, Council Tax and Grant income for each council that would be aggregated into a single unitary council. This is before taking account of the impact of the Fair Funding Review 2.0 on the distribution of future funding.

The following is based on 2025/26 to 2027/28 data, as per the 2025/26 MTFS for each council.

	Business Rates (£'000)			Grants (£'000)			Council Tax(£'000)		
Council	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Cherwell District Council	14,988	13,873	14,425	1,303	623	311	9,903	9,944	10,384
Oxford City Council	12,779	12,644	12,667	770	739	739	16,730	17,241	17,768
West Oxfordshire District Council	6,684	3,559	3,897	5,331	6,893	5,652	6,306	6,655	6,999
South Oxfordshire District Council	780	570	360	7,863	7,243	6,771	9,625	10,092	10,571
Vale of White Horse District Council	297	248	199	9,635	8,524	7,452	9,564	10,037	10,525
Oxfordshire County Council	101,925	103,648	105,439	64,839	62,254	62,242	542,549	572,292	605,079
Total	**137,453**	**134,542**	**136,987**	**89,741**	**86,276**	**83,167**	**594,677**	**626,261**	**661,326**

Medium Term Financial Strategies & Savings

Inputs: MTFS Historic Performance

Council	Delivered Savings	Planned Savings	Budget Gap	Base Budget
Oxfordshire County Council	Source: Productivity Plan 2024/25 & 2024/25 Outturn Report Comments: Savings identified as being 84% of £28.2m for 2023/24. Savings identified as £20m against target of £26m for 2024/25.	Source: Revenue Update & Monitoring report for 2025/26 savings. Previously Agreed and Proposed Budget Proposals 2025/26 - 2027/28 for 2026/27 savings. 2027/28 savings provided directly.	Source: Budget Book (MTFS) Comments: Budget gap refers to the Total contributions to and from reserves.	Source: Budget Book (MTFS) Comments: Note used is Net Operating Budget.
Cherwell District Council	Source: Finance and Performance Monitoring Report 2024/25 & Finance and Performance Monitoring Report 2023/34 Comments: Savings identified within Table 2: Analysis of variance for 2024/25 & 2023/24 under Savings non-delivery.	Source: MTFS Comments: Savings identified in Table 4.2.3: Service Efficiencies and Income Proposals.	Source: MTFS Comments: Budget gap refers to the Funding Gap / Surplus line within the MTFS.	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is Net Budget Requirement.
Oxford City Council	Source: Spending Plan (2023/24) and Statement of Accounts 2024/25. Comments: Savings identified for 2023/24 was £2.74m within spending plan. Savings identified for 2024/25 were pulled from the SoA, with savings totalled to £2.96m.	Source: General Fund Budget Proposals Summary Comments: Planned savings refers to the Cumulative MTFP Position table. The net change each FY has been calculated.	Source: MTFS Comments: Budget gap refers to the additional Budget transfer to/(from) reserves & additional & transfer to/(from) reserves from amendments.	Source: MTFS Note used is Net Budget Requirement.
West Oxfordshire District Council	Source: Outturn Report 2023/24 & Outturn Report 2024/25 Comments: Savings identified for each year in their respective outturn reports, where specific savings were detailed.	Source: MTFS Comments: Savings identified in MTFS are ones included in Target budget (NOE) lines.	Source: MTFS Comments: Budget gap refers to the use of GF reserves across the relevant years.	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is Target Budget (NOE).
South Oxfordshire District Council	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is base budget savings and in-year savings target.	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is base budget savings and in-year savings target.	Source: MTFS Comments: Budget gap refers to the Contribution to/(Use of) reserves to balance budget.	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is Net expenditure
Vale of White Horse District Council	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is base budget savings and in-year savings target.	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is base budget savings and in-year savings target.	Source: MTFS Comments: Budget gap refers to the Contribution to/(Use of) reserves to balance budget.	Source: MTFS Comments: Note used is Net expenditure

Qualitative Inputs: Historic MTFS Performance

The following sets out delivered and planned savings, transformation activity, and savings maturity across each council.

	Delivered Savings		Planned Savings			Budget Gap	Base Budget		% Saving of Budget			
	2023/24 (£m)	2024/25 (£m)	2025/26 (£m)	2026/27 (£m)	2027/28 (£m)	Cumulative Gap 2025/26 to 2027/28 (£m)	2024/25 (£m)	2025/26 (£m)	2024/25	2025/26	Historic Savings	Planned Savings
Oxfordshire County Council	23.7	20.0	27.4	9.5	3.0	£32.28	611.0	646.9	4.48%	4.65%	Achieved through longer-term service reviews, staff restructuring, and operational realignment.	OCC have placed emphasis on delivering cross-cutting savings across the service areas.
Cherwell District Council	0.286	0.042	1.375	1.695	1.856	£10.11	26.9	26.2	2.34%	5.27%	Achieved through staff restructuring, increase in income generation through fees.	Savings focus on the process of continuous improvement and service transformation across the district, focusing on improving efficiency.
Oxford City Council	1.085	0.548	1.582	3.232	1.479	£2.47	22.8	30.3	12.89%	5.21%	Achieved through staff restructuring, reduction in election costs.	Anticipated savings span all service areas and are based on improved fees & charges along with transformation activities.
West Oxfordshire Council	0.319	0.570	0.489	0.9	0	£6.45	16.3	18.2	3.99%	2.75%	Improvements in IT systems, trade waste services, as well as streamlined internal processes.	Savings through exploration of Ubico and Waste contracts. Limited information on further saving proposals available.
South Oxfordshire Council	0.007	0.22	0.1	0.044	0.1	£1.86	16.1	18.2	6.09%	4.12%	Reduced admin costs and contract costs, savings from office relocation.	Savings primarily focus on income generation, staff structure review and external funding deployment.
Vale of White Horse Council	1.060	0.207	0.274	0.078	0.1	£7.87	17.3	20.4	2.72%	3.33%	Income from other local authorities and reduced costs savings from offices.	Reduction in spend across staff apportionment, housing benefits budget and bad debt provision.
West Berkshire	5.0	13.5	8.2	16.8	7.8	£5.3 (only 2025/26) (£3m made up by the use of Exceptional Financial support)	174.5	192.3	7.74%	4.26%	Achieved through use of 3rd party partnerships and use of income generation through fees / charges.	Savings proposals focus on transformation programmes, directorate savings through efficiencies through use of technology, etc. Savings for future years will also have to cover the lack of EFS moving forward (£3m in 2025/26)

Assumptions

Assumptions	Elements Impacted
Historic / Present Savings may look like the following: • Vacancy Management and Workforce Restructuring • Back-office efficiencies and automation • Contract Renegotiation and Service Redesign • Income Generation and Cost Control efforts • Transformation and/or Recovery Programmes (i.e.. Financial Recovery Plans) • Asset Rationalisation and Disposals	**Assets:** Savings via asset disposals, better use of property / assets etc. **Third Party Spend:** Transformation programmes can lead to third party spend savings through contract rationalisation, more favourable contract conditions, less use of short-term / reactive spend (i.e.. including savings from better contract management, negotiation and market-scanning through improved strategic commissioning and procurement capabilities) **Staffing:** Forecasts relating to the future establishment may decrease depending on assessment of transformation programmes (i.e.. greater back office efficiencies, digitisation etc.).
Planned / Future Savings may look like the following: • Organisational Redesign and Capacity Building • Service Digitisation and Channel Shift • Demand Reduction and Prevention-led Approaches • Expansion of Income Strategies • Efficiency Reviews in Underexplored Areas (i.e.. IT)	

Indicative Base Expenditure & Funding at Vesting Day

Indicative Base Revenue Budget for One Oxfordshire

Estimated Funding and Expenditure as at vesting day:		
	£m	Notes
Funding		
Council Tax	661.3	2027/28 estimates including Council Tax Surplus of £8m built into MTFS for Oxfordshire County Council
Specific Grants	83.2	2027/28 figures
Business Rates	137.0	2027/28 figures
Total Income	881.5	
Expenditure		
Staffing Costs	275.4	Proportion based on 2025/26, no savings applied
Non – Staffing Costs	631.2	All other expenditure
Total Expenditure	906.6	Total Expenditure for all authorities in Oxfordshire.
Net Deficit	**-25.1**	
Use of Reserves and Balances	15.5	Planned use of reserves to cover budget deficit.
Deficit to manage after use of balance and reserves	**-9.6**	

Income Sources: Draft statement of accounts (2024/25), latest publicly available MTFS and MTFPs (2027/28)
Expenditure Sources: Statement of Accounts 2024/25, Net Operating Expenditure (2025/26 onwards), Establishment data (provided by LA),.

Reorganisation Savings

Employees (Staffing and Pay Costs)

Reorganisation Employee Savings

Savings from a reduced number of employees will be achieved:
Leadership: A reduction in senior leadership costs as a result of reducing duplication of senior posts (savings realised in year one).
Delivery: The benefit arising from the removal of duplication of front office, back office and service delivery roles (savings realised years one to three).

Employee Savings (£'000)

Total Spend on FTE*	£275,344	Leadership Savings***	£7,509
Spend on FTE excluding Leadership Savings	£267,835		

Calculating reorganisation Benefits

		Percentage Reduction from reorganisation**	Savings from reorganisation
Proportion of FTE Spend in Front Office (36%)**	£96,421	6%	£5,785
Proportion of FTE Spend in Service Delivery (37%)**	£99,099	3.5%	£3,468
Proportion of FTE Spend in Back Office (27%)**	£72,315	5%	£3,616
		Total Savings	£20,378

Reorganisation Saving
£20.4m reduction in Staffing Costs

* Refined baseline figure provided by councils. Spend on Fire and Rescue and Schools have been removed from the total baseline.
** Builds on County Council Network assumptions.
*** based on assumed salaries plus oncosts for a standard leadership team of 1 Chief Executive, 3 Directors, 2 Assistant Directors and 6 Heads of Service.

Third Party Spend

Overview of Third Party Spend

Third party spend relates to payments to external suppliers, contractual commitments, and ICT systems across all councils.

Current patterns of third party spend have been analysed to identify duplication and highlight opportunities for consolidation and efficiency in a One Oxfordshire council.

Methodology:

- Estimate the overall level of addressable third-party spend.
- Map existing supplier relationships, contracts, and ICT assets across councils.
- Quantify potential savings from supplier consolidation, contract renegotiation, and ICT harmonisation.
- Provide a baseline for a unified procurement and contract management approach in a new authority.

Oxfordshire Context

The model has been tailored to the Oxfordshire context as follows:

- Third party spend for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is assumed to not be addressable and has been removed from the addressability baseline.
- Because of the nature of Education, Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Public Health and the need to continue to fund care for individuals, spend in these categories is assumed to have 0% addressability in the short run and is excluded from the calculations for reorganisation savings.
- Oxfordshire County Council third party contracts related to county-only services are assumed to remain as-is, with no boundary or responsibility changes, and are therefore not included in the addressability savings estimates.

Inputs & Methodology

Determine addressable spend

- Use an estimated % of Revenue Outturn (RO) running costs to estimate third party spend where specific third party spend spend not provided
- Then assume a certain % of those costs are addressable depending on the type of spend.

Aggregate and model savings

- Aggregate existing county and district council spend to calculate total third party spend for One Oxfordshire.
- Apply a reduction assumption (economies of scale and duplication removal) to estimate achievable savings.

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Input	Description	Source
Revenue Outturn 2023/24 & 2024/25	Revenue Outturn (RO) 2023/24: Service Expenditure Summary. Running expenses only. Revenue Outturn (RO) 2024/25: Service Expenditure Summary. Running expenses only.	General Fund Revenue Account Outturn - RSX Service Expenditure Summary 2023/24 2024/25 RO Form

Assumptions

The following core assumptions have been applied throughout the Third Party Spend analysis to ensure consistency and clarity in the dataset and methodology.

Assumptions for Third Party Spend
Savings assumption – Variable % of addressable third-party spend (depending on scenario) can be saved through consolidation and efficiency, based on initial options appraisal. - Central services are assumed to have high addressability because software/licensing, networks, end-user devices, insurance, and facilities management can be rationalised quickly. - Environmental/regulatory and Highways are also assumed to have high addressability: many contracts are retenderable or re-lottable and benefit from route/specification/lot consolidation; exceptions are long-term waste disposal/energy-from-waste and highways contracts. - Cultural spend varies with leisure trust contracts; if most sites are on long concessions, addressability falls. - Housing (General Fund Revenue Account) is mixed: Temporary/agency accommodation markets are tight; Repairs & Maintenance frameworks are often more addressable. - Public Health has been deemed as 0% addressable due to ring-fenced grant funding.
Based on the government's Subjective Analysis – Service Expenditure 2022/23, the % of running expenses that was categorised as Third Party Spend has been utilised where theRevenue Outturn data for each local authority has been used as a baseline for spend. This is set out below.

Area	% of Running Expenses made up of third party spend
Education services	38%
Highways and transport services	38%
Children Social Care	64%
Adult Social Care	86%
Public Health	38%

Area	% of Running Expenses made up of third party spend
Housing services (General Fund Revenue Account only)	38%
Cultural and related services	38%
Environmental and regulatory services	38%
Planning and development services	38%
Central Services	38%

Inputs: Third Party Spend

The table below shows the total estimated third-party spend for each council. Revenue Outturn 2025/25 data has been utilised as there were inconsistencies in data completeness across contract registers. Where a third party spend figure has been directly provided (South Oxfordshire District Council & Vale of White Horse District Council), this has been used.

Council	Type	Third Party Spend (£'000)	Source
Cherwell District Council	District Council	11,120	RO Data 2024/25
Oxford City Council	District Council	23,926	RO Data 2024/25
West Oxfordshire District Council	District Council	8,150	RO Data 2024/25
South Oxfordshire District Council	District Council	12,476	Provided directly
Vale of White Horse District Council	District Council	10,508	Provided directly
Oxfordshire County Council	County Council	540,354	RO Data 2024/25
Total		**606,534**	

Inputs: Estimated Third Party Spend 2027/28

The total estimated third party spend for each service area is as follows:

Service Area	District Councils (£'000)	Oxfordshire County Council (£'000)	Total (£'000)
Education services	0	107,135	107,135
Highways and transport services	3,632	19,975	23,607
Children Social Care	0	73,395	73,395
Adult Social Care	0	289,265	289,265
Public Health	0	13,706	13,706
Housing services (Genera Fund)	10,840	2,563	13,403
Cultural and related services	6,074	2,601	8,675
Environmental and regulatory services	18,299	13,404	31,703
Planning and development services	9,921	1,351	11,272
Central Services	17,415	16,958	34,373
Total	**66,181**	**540,353**	**606,534**

Outputs: Estimated Addressable Third Party Spend & Reorganisation Savings

Area	Baseline (£'000)	Assessed Addressability (%)	Addressable Spend (£'000)	Assumed savings % to be achieved through reorganisation	Estimated reorganisation Savings (£'000)
Education services					
Highways and transport services	23,607	70%	16,525	4.5%	744
Children Social Care					
Adult Social Care					
Public Health					
Housing services (General Fund)	13,403	60%	8,042	4.5%	362
Cultural and related services	8,675	80%	6,940	4.5%	312
Environmental and regulatory services	31,703	80%	25,362	4.5%	1,141
Planning and development services	11,272	70%	7,891	4.5%	355
Central Services	34,373	85%	29,217	4.5%	1,315
Total	**123,033**		**93,977**		**4,229**

reorganisation Saving: £4.2m reduction in Third Party Spend

Because of the nature of Education, Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Public Health and the need to continue to fund care for individuals, spend in these categories is assumed to have 0% addressability in the short run and is excluded from the calculations for reorganisation savings.

Democracy (Councillor Numbers and Costs)

Introduction to Councillors and Allowances

This section estimates the savings and costs linked to changing the number of councillors and streamlining elections for One Oxfordshire.

It considers:

- **Councillor costs** – the basic allowances and special responsibility allowances (SRA) paid to elected councillors.
- **Election costs** – the cost of running local elections, and how these change when the county and district tiers are replaced by the new unitary authority.

The aims are to:

- Quantify the financial impact of reducing the number of councillors.
- Identify the election cost savings achievable from One Oxfordshire.
- Support decisions on governance structure and transition planning.

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Methodology:

1. **Calculate current costs**
   - Collect current Basic Allowance and Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) totals for all existing councils.
   - Calculate the total cost of county and district elections over a typical four-year cycle, using historic turnout and cost per vote data.

2. **Apply new governance models**
   - Apply the agreed assumptions for the number of councillors for One Oxfordshire.
   - Use benchmarked allowance rates for all new unitary councillors.

3. **Estimate savings**
   - Subtract new costs from current totals to give annual savings for members' allowances.
   - Remove the county-tier election costs and recalculate four-year election cycle costs to give election savings.

Inputs

Allowances and SRA data from all councils, along with historic voting and cost per vote data have been used to estimate the saving that would be achieved as a result of One Oxfordshire. The election cost model also factors in the number of votes cast, the election cycle in each area, and changes after unitarisation.

Members Input Categories	Description	Data input	Source
Number of councillors and allowances	The total number of elected councillors who sit on the council and represent different areas of the local authority and their total costs.	• Number of Members • Basic Allowances and Special Responsibility Allowance	• Website of each council
Cost of Elections	The amount of money spent by the council to run elections including staffing, polling stations, printing, and counting votes.	• Election cycle rate • Total number of votes cast over last four years (2021-25) • RO data - Net current expenditure - 'Conducting Elections' category only	• Website of each council • GOV.uk - Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England: Revenue outturn multi-year data set

Assumptions

Assumptions for Members and Elections	Where agreed?
General councillor allowances for One Oxfordshire will match the current County Council rate. Only basic allowance and SRA are included; other expenses such as mileage and IT are excluded due to variability.	Section 151 Officer working sessions
A range of councillor numbers (high, medium and low) has been assumed. The model takes the midpoint figure to model future member allowance costs.	Working sessions with programme team
Use of 'Conducting Elections' net current expenditure from published RO data • It is assumed the RO data accurately represents the costs incurred by the councils for running local elections. • Use of net current expenditure addresses any expenditure incurred for general elections due to income received from government to cover these elections. • Net current expenditure is taken across a four year period (one full election cycle) to reflect the different election modelsin each current organisation.	Working Assumption
It is assumed that the new unitary authority will elect all local councillors every four years, so there will be one election for each four year cycle. The overall election saving is calculated across the four years, then this is divided by four to provide an annualised saving.	Agreed Assumption

Inputs: Elections and Councillors Baseline

The current two-tier governance in Oxfordshire leads to numerous elections. This includes the upper tier local authority of Oxfordshire County Council and all 5 District councils. One Oxfordshire will streamline the elected-governance structure by consolidating district and county responsibilities. Basic Allowances from councils which have recently become unitary were benchmarked to estimate an average assumption for One Oxfordshire. Where possible, the same was calculated for Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) based on the number of SRA roles and their costs.

Council	Council type	No. of councillors	Basic Allowance (£'000)	SRA (£'000)	Total Allowances £'000	Election cycle	Votes cast over the last four years
Oxfordshire County Council	County	69	954	385	1,339	Whole	191,781
South Oxfordshire District Council	District	36	302	155	457	Whole	77,810
West Oxfordshire District Council	District	49	256	184	440	Thirds	68,173
Oxford City Council	District	48	263	130	393	Halves	80,017
Cherwell District Council	District	48	251	108	359	Thirds	113,137
Vale of White Horse District Council	District	38	286	169	455	Whole	62,849
Total		**331**	**2,310**	**1,131**	**3,442**	**N/A**	**593,767**

Inputs: Election Cost Baseline

Net Current Expenditure for 'Conducting Elections' from the RO returns for each council has been used to establish the overall baseline of election costs. This looks across four years (2021 to 2025) to establish costs for one full election cycle.

Council	Council type	Election cycle	Cost of conducting elections (£'000)				Total cost of conducting elections over 4 years (£'000)	Average cost per election (£'000)	Votes cast over the last four years	Average cost per vote
			2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25				
Oxfordshire County Council	County	Whole	£799	£24	£31	£62	£916	£916	191,781	£4.78
South Oxfordshire District Council	District	Whole	£76	£118	£314	£113	£621	£621	77,810	£7.98
West Oxfordshire District Council*	District	Thirds	£39	£78	£85	£76	£278	£93	68,173	£4.08
Oxford City Council	District	Halves	£94	£98	£122	£457	£771	£386	80,017	£9.64
Cherwell District Council	District	Thirds	£211	£376	£395	£470	£1,452	£484	113,137	£12.83
Vale of White Horse District Council	District	Whole	£103	£225	£350	£130	£808	£808	62,849	£12.86
Total			£1,322	£934	£1,212	£1,232	£4,846	£551	593,767	£8.69

*Local data provided as entered into the RO as 'Central Costs'

Outputs: Elections and Democracy Saving

Financial savings through consolidating member/councillor and election costs for One Oxfordshire is shown below. Total councillor numbers will be decided by the shadow leadership for the new council; this analysis does not intend to pre-empt these decisions.

Member Costs and Savings

Option	Population	Population per Member (Low)	Population per Member (High)	Population per Member (Mid)	No. Councillors (Low)	No. Councillors (High)	No. Councillors (Mid)	Member Allowance (Low) (£000)	Member Allowance (High) (£000)	Member Allowance (Mid) (£000)	Current Member Cost (£000)	Savings per year (£000)
One Oxfordshire	773,130	7,159	5,602	6,497	108	138	119	2,095	2,677	2,309	3,441	**1,132**

Local data provided as entered into the RO as 'Central Costs'

Election Costs and Savings

Council	Number of elections pre LGR	Number of elections post LGR	Cost of elections pre-LGR (£000)	Cost of elections post-LGR (£000)	Election Cost Saving over 4 years (£000)	Election Cost Saving annualized (£000)
One Oxfordshire	11 (plus OCC election)	1	£4,846	£916	£3,930	**£982.5**

reorganisation Savings Total annual democracy saving
£2.1m

Property (Operational Assets)

Overview of Operational Assets

Overview

The assets currently held by the County and District Councils would be aggregated into the asset portfolio for One Oxfordshire following local government reorganisation.

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Oxfordshire Context

The model has been tailored to the Oxfordshire context as follows:

- Only assets categorised as ‘Operational Assets’ and ‘Surplus Assets’ are assumed to be disposable.
- ‘Operational Assets’ are further broken down into subcategories, with a view that certain types are more addressable than others.
- Assets related to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service are assumed to not be addressable and have been removed from the addressability baseline, alongside other key subcategories that are politically sensitive that would not be rationalised through reorganisation (e.g. schools, parks, etc.).
- Where there are assets related to core service provision within a limited asset portfolio (e.g. Cherwell District Council’s waste disposal facilities), they have also been removed from the addressable baseline.
- Certain assets listed under ‘Operational Assets’ are income generating, such as Cherwell District Council and West Oxfordshire’s shopping centres, and would not be rationalised through reorganisation. As a whole, such commercial properties and small holdings have been removed from the addressable baseline.
- Certain types of assets such as car parks, libraries, community centres and leisure centres are not expected to feasibly be rationalised through reorganisation but may benefit from repurposing or disposal following a detailed review of service delivery models and strategic ambitions. This means that such assets could potentially be addressed through transformation.

Methodology

1. **Consolidate asset registers** – Gather asset data from each council, standardise it and remove Housing Revenue Account assets.
2. **Include planned disposals** – Use capital receipts already built into council's' MTFS or capital strategies.
3. **Add further disposals** – Include additional rationalisation opportunities identified through engagement, including an assumption that a third of surplus assets can be disposed through the reorganisation process.
4. **Adjust portfolios** – Subtract the value of disposals to show the likely Day 1 portfolio for One Oxfordshire.

Assumptions

Assumptions for Assets
The asset register for each council provides an accurate view of the estate portfolio.
Net book value is used as a proxy for market value, noting that the value of assets will need to be assessed during transition for a more accurate view.
Assets Under Construction and assets labelled as Infrastructure Work have been excluded from addressable baselines as these are recognised to be ongoing property developments, on top of existing assets, which are unlikely to be rationalised through implementation.
Assets categorised as Community Assets, Investment Properties, Council Dwelling & Heritage Assets are considered to be 'unaddressable' through local government reorganisation.
There is an estimated reorganisation benefit of 15% for a single unitary council.
A third of surplus assets may be disposed through local government reorganisation.
Income from capital receipts is not built into the comparative analysis, which primarily aims to understand what operational expenditure savings can be made against total expenditure.
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service assets will not be rationalised and have been removed from the baseline.
The original assumption around proportion of Council Revenue Expenditure on Property from the County Council Network Analysis has been amended from 5% to 2.5% due to refined net book value (NBV) of Heritage Assets and Community Assets, which typically take up greater asset maintenance spend.

Inputs

Input Asset categories	Description	Data input	Source
Property Asset Registers	The Property Asset Register is a detailed inventory of all land and buildings owned or leased by each council, including location, usage, ownership status, and asset value.	Property Asset Register	Data request
Additional land and property consolidation or exceptions	There are additional opportunities for rationalisation in a unitary, due to duplication of potential property assets, and unused property assets.	Additional land and property consolidation by property category	Engagement with council stakeholders

Inputs: Net Book Value of Operational Assets

The current Net Book Value (NBV) of assets for each council (excluding assets associated with the Housing Revenue Account for Oxford City Council), has been used to estimate the NBV of each council's current asset portfolio. This has been broken down into six categories of assets which make up the total NBV.

Organisation	Net Book Value Total (£'000)	1. Operational Assets (£'000)	2. Community Assets (£'000)	3. Surplus Assets (£'000)	4. Investment Properties (£'000)	5. Council Dwellings (£'000)	6. Heritage Assets (£'000)
Cherwell District Council	173,369	164,046	324	4,454	4,545	-	-
Oxford City Council	1,313,459	294,391	1,922	2,440	145,810	865,219	3,677
West Oxfordshire District Council	129,716	71,558	994	3,581	53,491	-	91
South Oxfordshire District Council	56,676	50,275	1,231	-	5,169	-	-
Vale of White Horse District Council	83,108	78,982	892	-	3,234	-	-
Oxfordshire County Council	1,509,869	1,477,700	-	8,274	23,895	-	-
Total	3,266,197	2,136,954	5,363	18,749	236,145	865,219	3,768

Inputs: Addressability of Operational Assets

Only Operational Assets are assumed to be addressable as part of reorganisation. Different categories of assets are assumed to have high, medium, low or no addressability either due to their own particular characteristics and may only be addressable following detailed review under a transformation programme.

High Addressability (60%)	Medium Addressability (30%)	Low Addressability (10%)	No Addressability (0%)
These types of assets are more easily addressable and more impacted by the reorganisation process. In the model, this means that the total NBV of these assets are considered highly addressable.	These assets are somewhat addressable, with the understanding that geographies and current spread of assets may make it more challenging to amalgamate such properties.	These types of assets have limited addressability. It may be more likely that these benefits are delivered through transformation, and would not be rationalised easily from reorganisation.	These types of assets are more sensitive in nature or are overall essential to the provision of core services (e.g. Cherwell's waste disposal facility).

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	High Addressability (60%)	Medium Addressability (30%)	Low Addressability (10%)	No Addressability (0%)
Reorganisation	• Offices • Depots • Fleets	N/A	N/A	• Schools • Libraries • Parks • Crematoria • Waste Disposal • Commercial property • Caravan Site • Public Convenience • Care Homes • Community Centres
Transformation	• Community Centres • Allotments • Car Parks • Leisure Centre • Sports Facility • Libraries	N/A	• Care Homes	It is assumed that addressable assets from reorganisation will have limited material benefits from transformation to minimise possibilities of double-counting. • Offices, Depots, Fleets

Outputs: Addressability of Operational Assets

The refined baselines for the property categories relevant to both reorganisation and transformation are shown below.

Reorganisation Baseline

(£'000)	Cherwell District Council	Oxford City Council	West Oxfordshire District Council (*)	South Oxfordshire District Council	Vale of White Horse District Council	Oxfordshire County Council	Oxfordshire Total
High Addressability	13,156	10,294	385	2,056	8,894	22,069	**56,856**

Transformation Baseline

(£'000)	Cherwell District Council	Oxford City Council	West Oxfordshire District Council (*)	South Oxfordshire District Council	Vale of White horse District Council	Oxfordshire County Council	Oxfordshire Total
High Addressability	53,187	133,206	27,675	450	6,458	83,894	**304,870**
Low Addressability	-	-	-	-	-	3,900	**3,900**

** West Oxfordshire District Council has listed offices with no Net Book Value attached (eg.Elmfield Office) so the baseline may be slightly lower as a result.*

Outputs: Modelled Disposal and Capital Receipt Benefits

The tables below show the potential one-off capital receipts that could be delivered through property rationalisation as part of reorganisation and potentially through transformation in the longer term. It is assumed that a third of assets categorised as 'surplus' can potentially be released through rationalisation.

Reorganisation Disposals	Total NBV of Category of Asset (£'000)	Addressability	Addressable Property (£'000)	reorganisation Benefit	Addressable Capital Receipt (£'000)	Capital Receipt for Surplus Disposal (A third of Surplus Assets) (£'000)	Total Capital Receipt (£'000)
High Addressability	56,856	60%	34,114	15%	5,117	6,250	11,367

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Transformation Disposals	Total NBV of Low Addressability Assets (£'000)	Addressability	Addressable Property (£'000)	Receipt Potential (%) (Base)	Addressable Capital Receipt (£'000) (Base)	Receipt Potential (%) (Stretch)	Addressable Capital Receipt (£'000) (Stretch)
High Addressability	304,870	60%	182,922	3.5%	6,402	5.0%	9,146
Low Addressability	3,900	10%	390	3.5%	14	5.0%	20
Totals	308,770		183,312		6,416		9,166

Operational Assets Saving

Property Operational expenditure has been estimated by taking 2027/28 forecast expenditure and assuming 2.5% of revenue relates to property to set the baseline. Applying a 15% reorganisation benefit for a single unitary generates a saving of £3.4m.

Organisation	Total Expenditure 2027/28 (£'000)	% of Revenue Expenditure on Property	Addressable Property Spend (£'000)	reorganisation Benefit (%)	reorganisation Savings (£'000)
One Oxfordshire	906,585	2.5%	22,665	15%	3,400

reorganisation Saving
£3.4m reduction in Property Running Costs

Transformation

Methodology

Approach: Transformation

1. **Use post-reorganisation baseline figures from each of the relevant financial modules:** FTE Spend (split across Front Office, Service Delivery and Back Office), Income (Sales, Fees and Charges) and Third Party Spend (Addressability).
2. **Apply revised % savings** (base and stretch) for One Oxfordshire to the relevant transformation categories
3. **Transformation benefit measured as a savings value (£), calculated** as baseline × % saving.
4. **Articulate totals** sum across categories to give annual recurring savings in year 5 (full realisation).

FTE (Front Office, Service Delivery, Back Office)

Addressable Third Party Spend

Income Generation

Considerations: Existing Transformation Plans

Detailed below are the planned savings planned to be delivered ahead of the reorganisation process. A high-level review looked to understand how likely the identified savings and transformation programmes will be delivered prior to vesting day. This does not assume that opportunities will be wholly realised by vesting day but instead recognises that this may impact the size of opportunity for future, unaddressed transformation.

Change Initiative	Organisation	Anticipated Savings*	Impact on…	Deliverability Review
Customer Experience Programme	Oxford City Council	£0.8m	FTE (Front Office)	**Medium**: Relatively prudent savings target for similar programmes, and in line with savings delivered in previous years.
Oxfordshire Waste and Environmental Services Transformation Programme	West Oxfordshire District Council	£3.0m	Third Party Spend	**Medium:** In partnership with Cherwell District Council and Oxford City Council, currently undergoing a review of alternative options for waste and recycling collection. Dependent on wider market conditions.
Delivering the Future Together: Organisational Redesign	Oxfordshire County Council	£5.9m	FTE (All)	**Medium**: Dependent on transformation capacity and capability, but the Council has the ambition to conduct a fundamental redesign of all services.
Delivering the Future Together: Commissioning and Contract Management	Oxfordshire County Council	£5.0m	Third Party Spend	**Medium**: Dependent on transformation capacity and capability, and addressability of third party spend in the lead up to LGR.
Delivering the Future Together: Additional Commercial Opportunities	Oxfordshire County Council	£1.0m	Income Generation	**Low:** Higher dependency on income generating opportunities which can be variable and having the capacity to deliver against them.

Source: MTFS, Transformation Plans supplied by Councils, Cabinet Decision (Waste Programme)

Inputs: Potential Transformation Savings

One Oxfordshire will have the opportunity to realise further savings by transforming the way they provide services. Detailed below is a high-level summary of what additional opportunities could be explored, allocated against the three primary categories of expenditure.

Service Area	General Projections*	High-level Opportunities for Oxfordshire
Adult Social Care	1-5%	• **Assets:** Examine opportunities to repurpose existing assets to support the provision of community-based services. • **FTE:** Organisational redesign to support effective service delivery model using latest technology to enhance impact and efficiency. Cross-cutting opportunities related to customer and contact management, as well as cultural and behavioural change. • **third party spend:** Improved strategic commissioning across housing, mental health, and care homes to reduce duplication and improve' provider rate.
Children's Services	1-5%	• **Assets:** Potential reduction in administrative buildings and integration of co-located services (e.g. care with housing, co-locating Family centres). • **FTE:** Rationalisation of commissioning teams and support staff. Cross-cutting opportunities related to customer and contact management, as well as cultural and behavioural change. Review use of data to support with enhance demand management, prediction and holistic care. • **third party spend:** Review the care cycle, enhance preventative approach to care provisions and aim to reduce the rate of escalation for high-cost placements.
Place	6-10%	• **Assets:** Develop an asset strategy, identifying additional opportunities for income generation and cost recovery (e.g. disposal of surplus assets post-reorganisation and review cost-recovery in comparison to similar Councils). • **FTE**: Review the service delivery model, to identify current service levels and standards, use of digital, efficiencies in existing operating model. Cross-cutting opportunities related to customer and contact management, as well as cultural and behavioural change. • **third party spend:** Improved long-term contract management, commissioning and procurement capabilities to support greater grip over long-term management.
Corporate Services	6-15%	• **FTE:** Organisational redesign to remove duplicative activity and shadow spend within services, leveraging automation and emerging technology to streamline processes (e.g. recruitment, P2P) and improve self-serve capacity. Cross-cutting opportunities related to customer and contact management, as well as cultural and behavioural change. • **third party spend:** Review current use of agency spend as part of organisational redesign and assess opportunities to reduce reliance on external agency spend, particularly relating to specialist services (e.g. Legal), and use of data to drive performance management.

**Transformation portfolios developed from working with Councils elsewhere, may vary depending on previous savings delivered, existing transformation in place, resource capacity. Savings projections draw on demand management, FTE release and reduced third party spend.*

Inputs: Transformation Savings Assumptions

The following are estimates of the potential additional savings that can be delivered through further transformation, adjusted from the general savings delivered from elsewhere. **These figures could be subject to change following a more detailed review of the future organisation, including an assessment of its actual people, process and technology.**

Category	% Transformation Saving	Rationale
Front office FTE (Adults', Children's, Place and Corporate Services)	3.0%	Two Customer Experience Programmes are set to be delivered ahead of vesting day, which may equip the incoming authorities with more digitised, capability-driven Front Office operations. Given that this is only being explicitly delivered in two organisation, there is still potential for transformation, albeit overall size of opportunity is likely to be smaller than the Back Office.
Service delivery FTE (Primarily Adult's, Children's, Place)	3.0%	Benefits here would be focused on realising the benefits of more effective and efficient service delivery models, including implementing fundamental changes to service provision to reduce demand. Anticipated savings are lower than in the Front and Back Office, as service delivery activity is less impacted by digitisation but would still benefit from process optimisation.
Back office FTE (Primarily Corporate Services)	5.0%	Some planned transformation for back office and service delivery as part of Oxfordshire County Council's organisational redesign, but there has overall been a greater focus on transforming the front office. Back office services are typically more influenced by digitisation.
Third Party Spend (Cross-Cutting)	3.5%	There are opportunities to build on initiatives underway in Oxfordshire County Council and enhancing the future organisation's overall commissioning, procurement and contract management capabilities.
Income	1.0%	Some gains from income generation through review of sales. fees and charges for District charging of key services (e.g. green waste, planning) and harmonising to new standards. Based on 2023/24 RSX data, Oxfordshire has similar fees and charges rates with its comparator group (e.g. Gloucestershire, Surrey, Buckinghamshire).
Assets	5%	Review of current use of assets to assess cost recovery and usages of typically income generating assets (e.g. car parks) and to align the strategic use of assets with service delivery models (e.g. better co-location of services, repurposing certain buildings to enhance place-based service provision).

Outputs: Transformation Savings

The table below shows the calculation of estimated annual recurring savings and income growth that could be achieved through transformation undertaken by the One Oxfordshire council.

The One Oxfordshire proposal will be building on a track record of transformation delivery in Oxfordshire County Council in particular, which is reflected in the base and stretch % applied to transformation benefits. If the future unitary authority was able to push transformation by, for example:

- A further 1% on TPS (as a result of a mature commercial function) would result in an additional c£6m in transformation benefits.
- A further 2% on back office functions (as a result of leveraging AgenticAI and automation) would result in an additional £1.4m in transformation benefits.

Category	Baseline (£'000)	Transformation %	Transformation Saving (£'000)	Transformation Stretch %	Transformation Stretch Saving £
Front office staffing spend	**90,635**	3.0%	2,719	3.0%	2,719
Service delivery staffing spend	**95,631**	3.0%	2,869	3.0%	2,869
Back office staffing spend	**68,700**	5.0%	3,435	7.0%	4,809
Third Party Spend	**602,345**	3.5%	21,082	4.5%	27,106
Income Generation	**209,229**	1.0%	2,092	1.0%	2,092
Assets (Operational Expenditure)	**19,265**	5.0%	963	5.0%	963
Total	**1,085,805**	**3.1%**	**33,160**	**3.7%**	**40,558**

Debt and Liabilities

Assumptions

Assumptions for Income, Debt and Liabilities
The cost of transferring debt between councils has not been considered.
Projected year-on-year Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) is used as a proxy to forecast the total debts and liabilities on vesting day.
Housing Revenue Account (HRA) debt and liabilities have been removed from total debts, to support with a focused view on General Revenue Fund impact and analysis across the model.
Oxfordshire County Council's High Needs SEND DSG deficit (estimated to be over £150m by 31 March 2026 and to continue to increase up to 31 March 2028) is not factored into the debt and liability position.

Consolidated Assets and Liabilities

Assets and Liabilities			
Category	**One Oxfordshire (£m)**	**Oxfordshire HRA (£m)**	**Notes**
Assets			
Fixed Assets	4,232.1	1,339.1	Only long-term assets, no assumed disposal post rationalisation.
Liabilities			
Long Term Liabilities	1,258.1	586.1	Debt and Long Term Borrowing
Current Liabilities	528.3	-	Short Term Borrowing

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Asset Sources: Statement of Accounts, Capital Expenditure from MTFS and MTFP Capital Programmes.
Liabilities Sources: MTFS and MTFPs, Treasury Management Strategy, information supplied by local authorities.

Calculation of estimated long term liabilities at vesting day:

Total liabilities for 2024/25 calculated from all current liabilities and long term liabilities = £1,513.6m (as shown on slide 62 and excluding Oxford City Council HRA liabilities).

The total planned change in the Capital Financing Requirement (£272.8m – see slide 64) is then used to project liabilities forward from 2024/25 to the estimated 2028/29 position (£1,786.4m).

Current liabilities of £528.3m are then subtracted from the total estimated forward looking liabilities in 2028/29 giving Long Term Liabilities of £1,258.1m (£1,513.6m + £272.8m - £528.3m = £1,258.1m) .

Introduction to Debts and Liabilities

The following categories of debt and borrowing have been considered to provide a view of the financial position of One Oxfordshire in Year 1.

Overview

The financial obligations that would transfer into One Oxfordshire bring together debt and borrowing to:

- Show the size and sustainability of liabilities in for One Oxfordshire.
- Ensure transparency about what the new council would inherit.
- Support prudent financial planning and early risk management.

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Oxfordshire Context

- As part of the overall model's focus on understanding the future financial position from a General Fund perspective, HRA-related debts and liabilities has been excluded from calculations.
  - **Oxford City Council**: The only council in Oxfordshire with an HRA is Oxford City Council. The HRA has been removed from baselines.
- Some Councils have had limited external borrowing and capital financing requirements, leading to lower figures for total debts and liabilities as well as MRP payments.
  - **South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Council** have not had a capital financing requirement for several years. Capital Programme Growth Bids for both councils creates a capital financing requirement from 2025/26 onwards. Therefore, there is no anticipated MRP in 2024/25 or 2025/26.
- DSG High Needs Deficits are not included in the Y1 Balance Sheet due to the current uncertainty around Government's approach to resolving this.

Categories of Debt	Description
Debt	Total outstanding debt obligations
Short-Term Borrowing	Temporary borrowing repayable within 12 months
Long-Term Borrowing	Borrowing repayable 12 months or longer
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	Underlying need to borrow for capital purposes
Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Deficit	Prior year overspends on High Needs DSG
Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)	Central government-approved borrowing to cover revenue pressures

Methodology and Inputs: Debts and Liabilities

1. **Start with forward-looking liabilities**
   - Use each council's capital financing requirement (CFR) as a proxy for borrowing need. It is assumed MRP is already accounted for in the CFR.
   - Assume councils use reserves where available (as set out in their MTFS).

2. **Aggregate totals**
   - Combine Oxfordshire County Council's liabilities with the district council liabilities to produce a unitary-level position for One Oxfordshire.

Input	Description	Source
Total Financial Liabilities	**Sum of:** Short term creditors, Short term borrowing, Short term provisions, Deferred liabilities, Long term borrowing, Long term provisions, Exceptional Financial Support	Statement of Accounts for County and District councils
Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Deficit	Prior year overspends on DSG relating to the High Needs Block and forecast for 2025/26. Cumulative overspend of £92m as at 31 March 2025 estimated to increase to over £150m by 31 March 2026 and to continue to increase up to vesting day. Further information from the Government about how the deficits will be managed is awaited as part of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27.	Specific and special revenue grants (SG) budget 2024/25, GOV.UK. Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 and updates in Oxfordshire County Council Business Management & Monitoring Reports to Cabinet.
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR) projections	The CFR reflects the Council's underlying need to borrow.	Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, Engagement with Finance Leads

Inputs: Liabilities & Debt

Current and long term liabilities are set out in the Statement of Accounts for 2024/25. The total liability is calculated by adding current liabilities and long-term liabilities and then subtracting Housing Revenue Account liabilities held by Oxford City Council.

Councils	2024/25 Current Liability (£'000)	2024/25 Long Term Liability (£'000)	2024/25 Housing Revenue Account (£'000)	2024/25 & 2025/26 Exceptional Financial Support (£'000)	2024/25 Total Liability (excluding HRA) (£'000)
Cherwell District Council	67,768	183,694	-	-	251,462
Oxford City Council	81,013	318,510	270,910	-	128,613
West Oxfordshire District Council	19,597	5,280	-	-	24,877
South Oxfordshire District Council	48,785	-	-	-	48,785
Vale of White Horse District Council	105,661	-	-	-	105,661
Oxfordshire County Council	205,505	748,721	-	-	954,226
Total	**528,329**	**1,256,205**	**270,910**	**-**	**1,513,624**

Inputs: Capital Financing Requirement

The table summarises the capital financing requirement and forecasts, as stated in the MTFS and/or provided by each council.

Capital Financing Requirement	2024/25 £'000	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000
Cherwell District Council	234,400	239,800	236,900	233,700	233,700
Oxford City Council	74,202	95,131	130,785	159,420	198,394
West Oxfordshire District Council*	28,620	34,540	33,500	32,150	31,060
South Oxfordshire District Council**	-	12,000	13,900	16,800	15,900
Vale of White Horse District Council**	-	8,300	10,153	13,032	12,665
Oxfordshire County Council	505,477	559,002	598,412	623,125	623,796
Total Capital Financing Requirement	**842,699**	**948,773**	**1,023,650**	**1,078,227**	**1,115,515**
Oxford City Council (HRA)	406,026	527,632	599,659	663,716	721,262

*As detailed in West Oxfordshire's Capital Strategy

** South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse have a borrowing need but would not need to borrow externally to fund its Capital Programme Growth Bids. It has no anticipated MRP in 2024/25 or 2025/26

Inputs: Planned Change to Capital Financing Requirement

The year-on-year change in the CFR is used to project future liabilities.

Year-on-Year change in CFR	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000
Cherwell District Council	5,400	-2,900	-3,200	0
Oxford City Council (General Fund)	20,929	35,654	28,635	38,974
West Oxfordshire District Council	5,920	-1,040	-1,350	-1,090
South Oxfordshire District Council	12,000	1,900	2,900	-900
Vale of White Horse District Council	8,300	1,853	2,879	-367
Oxfordshire County Council	53,525	39,410	24,713	671
Total Planned Change in Capital Financing Requirement (*)	**106,074**	**74,877**	**54,577**	**37,288**
Oxford City Council (HRA)	121,606	72,027	64,057	57,546

(*) total change in CFR from 2025/26 to 2028/29 = £272,816,000

Council Tax Harmonisation

Methodology: Council Tax Harmonisation

1. **Project Future Council Tax Base**
   - Use Council MTFS forecasts of the Tax Base where possible, or previous historical tax base data to forecast future growth

2. **Project Future Tax Rates**
   - District tax rates increase at the maximum of £5 or 2.99% per year, and Unitary/County rates at 4.99% per year. This is based on current referendum limits.
   - Model harmonisation by aligning to the weighted average rate.

3. **Calculate Unitary Authority Tax Receipt**
   - Apply the harmonised rate to the projected taxbase.
   - Calculate receipts for One Oxfordshire.

4. **Calculate Foregone or Gained Income**
   - Compare projected harmonised receipts with a baseline (assuming current rates continue with max increases).
   - Foregone Income = Baseline receipts – Harmonised receipts

Inputs: Council Tax Harmonisation

Input	Description	Source
Current tax base (2025/26)	Current tax base	MTFS
Band D rates	Band D council tax for local authorities excluding parish precepts for 2025 to 2026.	Council Tax levels set by local authorities in England 2025 to 2026 (revised)
Tax base growth projections	Tax base growth projections from MTFS and/or external analyses completed by the district councils. Projected increases in Band D rates leading up to vesting day follow current referendum limits.	MTFS

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Inputs: Council Tax Band D Projections

The estimated Band D for each council assumes a maximum increase of either £5 or 2.99% per annum for district councils, and a 4.99% increase for Oxfordshire County Council.

District	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34
Oxfordshire County Council	£1,911.40	£2,007	£2,107	£2,212	£2,322	£2,438	£2,560	£2,688	£2,822
Cherwell District Council	£158.50	£164	£169	£174	£179	£184	£190	£195	£201
Oxford City Council	£356.72	£367	£378	£390	£401	£413	£426	£438	£452
West Oxfordshire District Council	£129.38	£134	£139	£144	£149	£154	£159	£164	£169
South Oxfordshire District Council	£151.24	£156	£161	£166	£171	£176	£182	£187	£193
Vale of White Horse District Council	£161.69	£167	£172	£177	£182	£188	£193	£199	£205

Outputs: Harmonise Council Tax Using Weighted Average

The weighted-average has been modelled on 2028/29 Band D by applying tax base growth and expected precepts from the MTFS, then harmonised to that rate on Day 1. For One Oxfordshire this produces a harmonised Oxfordshire Band D of £2,415.80. This approach—favoured by most councils in other recent LGR —sets the single rate equal to the weighted average of existing rates, so there is no material change to aggregate council tax income (unlike phasing over several years, which changes timing and distributional impacts). It reflects where taxpayers actually are and therefore defines the income envelope for the financial case, enabling like-for-like option comparison and compliance with referendum limits.

District	Tax base	County Precept (£'000)	County Band D (£)	District Precept (£'000)	District Band D (£)	Total Council Tax (£'000)	Total Band D charge (£)	Harmonised Band D (£)	Change on Band D (£)	Change %
Cherwell District Council	62,034	137,223	2,212.1	10,765	173.5	147,989	2,385.6	**2,415.80**	30.2	1.26%
Oxford City Council	48,730	107,793		18,989	389.7	126,782	2,601.7		-186.0	-7.15%
West Oxfordshire District Council	50,868	112,523		7,344	144.4	119,868	2,356.4		59.3	2.52%
South Oxfordshire District Council	66,547	147,205		11,063	166.2	158,268	2,378.3		37.5	1.58%
Vale of White Horse District Council	62,404	138,040		11,034	176.8	149,074	2,388.9		26.9	1.13%
Totals	**290,583**	**642,785**		**59,196**		**701,981**				

Financial Options Appraisal

Options Appraisal compared to detailed Financial Case

The financial analysis was undertaken across two phases by PwC. For comparative purposes the initial phase focused on a high level financial options appraisal for all the LGR options. In the second phase, set out in the Financial Case on pages 2 - 69, a detailed financial model was developed for Oxfordshire County Council's preferred option of a 1UA (One Oxfordshire) with more refined assumptions and deeper insight.

	Options Appraisal (page 70 – 85)	Financial Case (page 2 – 69)
Description	The outputs are an objective appraisal of the costs and benefits of different reorganisation options. It looks to illustrate **the high-level financial implications of implementing and operating** a single unitary authority, two unitary authorities or three unitary authorities.	The financial case sets out the detailed implications for One Oxfordshire. It **helps to model what the future budgets will look like**, provides a more detailed view on the **starting financial position**, and draws out the financial implications of local government reorganisation and wider transformation benefits.
Includes	• Aggregation and disaggregation of net revenue expenditure in simple terms, grouped primarily by staffing spend, Third Party Spend, Property and Democracy expenditure. • One-off costs related to the transition to the new authority (i.e.. redundancy). • A phased view of net benefits in relation to the costs of LGR and any recurring service costs.	• Refined view of the benefits of aggregation and/or disaggregation, through a detailed look at Assets, Third Party Spend, Income, Borrowing and Debt, Policy and Transformation, Member Numbers, Demand Increases, MTFS and Staffing Pay. • A range of outcomes depending on the direction organisations choose to put ahead, including an upper and lower boundary financial forecast for specific components (i.e.. cost of members).
This does NOT…	Provide any commentary around service quality, democratic representation or any other factors that may factor into the wider strategic case.	The outputs present a detailed view of the Year 1 financial budgets and position of One Oxfordshire. While a detailed model, it remains an estimation. It does not forecast the exact annual income (i.e.. figure for Tax Receipts) or outgoing expenditure, as those are reliant on policy decisions

Options for Local Government Reorganisation

Three options for Local Government Reorganisation have been proposed for the Oxfordshire region which involve the creation of either 1, 2 or 3 new Unitary Authorities. The table shows the geographical split for each option and estimated population.

Option	Components (City / district / borough level)	Population	Guidance
1 Unitary Authority	**One Oxfordshire:** Covering Oxfordshire County Council and 5 districts; Oxford City, West Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire and Cherwell.	**One Oxfordshire:** 750,200	The size of One Oxfordshire is in line with findings from the County Council Network and MHCLG that Unitary Authorities greater than 500k provide greater financial benefits.
2 Unitary Authorities	**Oxford & Shires:** Oxford City, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell. **Ridgeway:** South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Berkshire.	**Oxford & Shires:** 450,836 **Ridgeway:** 462,761	The size of the proposed Unitary Authorities are broadly in line with the general steer from MHCLG, noting that the 2UAs would cover a population of approximately 500k.
3 Unitary Authorities	• **Greater Oxford:** Covers around the City of Oxford • **Ridgeway Council:** South Oxfordshire, White Horse and Vale and West Berkshire • **Northern Unitary:** West Oxfordshire and Cherwell.	**Greater Oxford:** 240,000 **Ridgeway:** 430,000 **Northern Oxfordshire:** 265,000	Due to the anticipated boundary shifts, this option has not determined the exact size and population of the proposed unitary authorities. To note, initial figures suggest that two out of the three proposed UAs would be notably smaller than the steer set out by MHCLG, indicating a lesser opportunity to realise financial benefit.

Options Appraisal - Reorganisation (Page 1 of 3)

The table below shows, for ease of reference, the gross annual benefit that the financial options appraisal estimates could be achieved in each of the LGR options. It also shows the estimated annual costs of disaggregation, the net annual benefit and the one-off transitions costs that it is estimated would be incurred in order to implement each option. Finally it shows the cumulative net benefit after one year and after five years.

Category		Gross annual benefit	Additional annual costs	Recurring net annual benefit	One-off transition costs	Payback period	Net benefit after 1 year	Net benefit after 5 years	Comments
Single UA for all of Oxfordshire: One Oxfordshire	Reorganisation	£27.3m	£0	£27.3m	£23.8m	3.1 years	-£16.3m	£44.3m	This option achieves greater financial benefits from LGR due to consolidation, economies of scale and addressing duplication. As County services are not disaggregated, there are no additional annual costs. Transition costs are lower to reflect the lower complexity involved in not disaggregating County services when setting up the new Unitary Authority arrangement.
2 UAs - Oxford & Shires and Ridgeway	Reorganisation	£24.9m	£3.0m	£21.9m	£30.4m	4.2 years	-£24.9m	£16.6m	The inclusion of West Berkshire means that while % savings from LGR are lower, the proportion is applied against a larger baseline. While existing West Berkshire infrastructure will be used (e.g. senior leadership, statutory posts are already in place), this option incurs additional annual costs for running disaggregated County services that do not currently exist at the same level in West Berkshire.
3UAs - Greater Oxford, North Oxfordshire and Ridgeway	Reorganisation	£20.2m	£10.7m	£9.5m	£32.5m	8.7 years	-£34.7m	-£35.5m	There are lower financial benefits due to the reduced opportunities for consolidation. While existing West Berkshire infrastructure has been taken into consideration, additional annual costs are incurred due to additional senior leadership, management for disaggregated servicers, and democratic costs. Additional transition costs are incurred due to new council infrastructure and redrawing boundaries.

Options Appraisal - Transformation (Page 2 of 3)

In addition to the reorganisation costs and benefits, the impact of subsequent transformation following LGR has been calculated using a standard approach and set of assumptions for all three options. This shows the estimated benefits and transformation costs, plus cumulative net benefit after one year and after five years, for both a base and stretch scenario.

Category		Gross annual benefit	Additional annual costs	Recurring net annual benefit	One-off transition costs	Payback period	Net benefit after 1 year	Net benefit after 5 years	Comments
Single UA for all of Oxfordshire One Oxfordshire	Transformation (base)	£20.9m	N/A	£20.9m	£14.6m	1.7 years	-£1.5m	£37.7m	The transformation calculations look at the additional efficiency savings and income growth the new authorities could achieve post-vesting day through localised service delivery agreements and transformation. At this initial Option Appraisal level, it takes a set of standard assumptions, which have not been closely amended to localised factors and conditions. This aims to: • Develop an indicative view of savings potential over and above reorganisation benefits. • Consider transformation potential independent of structural model and delivered once consolidation is complete. Transformation benefits are calculated against three categories: • FTE (Front Office, Service Delivery, Back Office) • Addressable Third Party Spend • Income Growth West Berkshire is included in the baseline for the 2UA and 3UA options thereby influencing the overall transformation benefits calculated using this standard approach.
	Transformation (stretch)	£31.1m	N/A	£31.1m	£21.7m	1.7 years	-£2.2m	£55.9m	
2 UAs - Oxford & Shires and Ridgeway	Transformation (base)	£25.6m	N/A	£25.6m	£17.9m	1.7 years	-£1.8m	£46.1m	
	Transformation (stretch)	£37.9m	N/A	£37.9m	£26.5m	1.7 years	-£2.7m	£68.2m	
3UAs - Greater Oxford, North Oxfordshire and Ridgeway	Transformation (base)	£25.8m	N/A	£25.8m	£18.1m	1.7 years	-£1.8m	£46.5m	
	Transformation (stretch)	£38.2m	N/A	£38.2m	£26.7m	1.7 years	-£2.7m	£68.7m	

Options Appraisal – Combined Summary (Page 3 of 3)

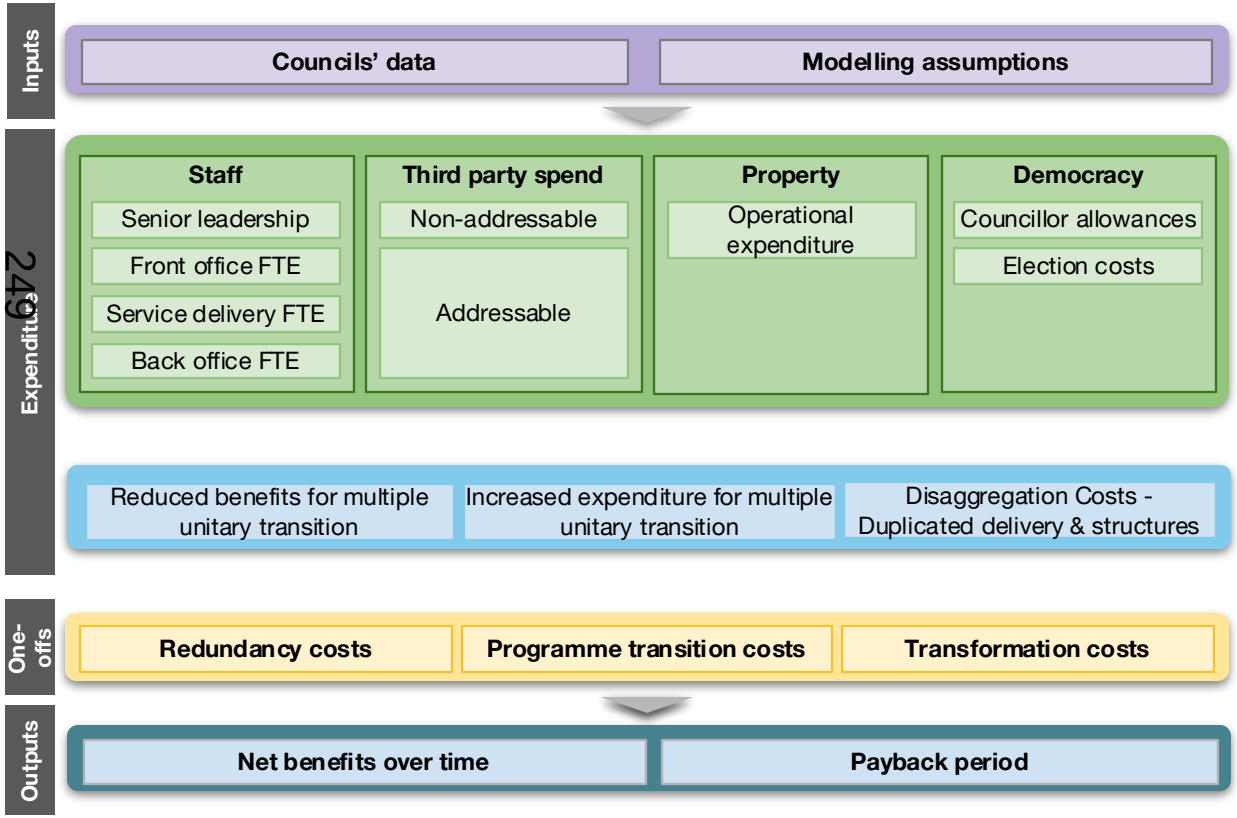
The table below shows the combined reorganisation and transformation costs and benefits position for all three LGR options based on the high-level analysis within this Options Appraisal.

Category		Gross annual benefit	Additional annual costs	Recurring net annual benefit	One-off transition costs	Payback period	Net benefit after 1 year	Net benefit after 5 years
Single UA for all of Oxfordshire One Oxfordshire	Combined reorganisation and transformation (base)	£48.2m	£0	£48.2m	£38.4m	2.8 years	-£17.8m	£81.9m
	Combined reorganisation and transformation (stretch)	£58.4m	£0	£58.4m	£45.5m	2.7 years	-£18.5m	£100.2m
2 UAs - Oxford & Shires and Ridgeway	Combined reorganisation and transformation (base)	£50.5m	£3m	£47.5m	£48.3m	3.4 years	-£26.7m	£62.7m
	Combined reorganisation and transformation (stretch)	£62.8m	£3m	£59.8m	£56.9m	3.2 years	-£27.6m	£84.8m
3UAs - Greater Oxford, North Oxfordshire and Ridgeway	Combined reorganisation and transformation (base)	£46.0m	£10.7m	£35.3m	£50.6m	4.7 years	-£36.5m	£11m
	Combined reorganisation and transformation (stretch)	£58.4m	£10.7m	£47.7m	£59.2m	4.2 years	-£37.4m	£33.2m

The analysis for this Options Appraisal uses publicly available data and consistent assumptions applied in the same way across all three proposals for local government reorganisation. More detailed analysis is undertaken for the Financial Case of the One Oxfordshire proposal to further develop anticipated benefits and costs, using local insights and tailored assumptions. This results in more refined and prudent totals in the Financial Case. It is anticipated that the councils preparing proposals for other options will have refined their more detailed cases in a similar way.

Financial Options Appraisal: Methodology

The illustration below sets out the key components of the modelling undertaken for the purposes of this financial options appraisal. The detailed financial case then builds in more detail and refines assumptions to build deeper understanding of costs and benefits.



Inputs
Include data supplied by County and District councils, public data and assumptions based on prior LGR activity. This relates to General Fund only and excludes HRA.

Benefits of Reorganisation
Weightings applied to three types of spend, with proportionate percentage reductions applied. Democracy benefits are based on the number of councils involved in the analysis, and the cost per vote cast in most recent elections.

Benefits of Transformation
Increased leverage of the above benefits available through transformation.

Disbenefits / Disaggregation Costs
Assumed costs of disaggregating county-level services, including children's services and adult social care for scenarios resulting in multiple unitaries. Plus additional costs for additional UAs.

Costs of Transition
One-off costs and proportional redundancy costs incurred to transition / implement the new UAs.

Outputs
Projected net benefits from different re-organisation scenarios.

Financial Options Analysis: Methodology

Third party spend relates to all payments for goods and services, and excludes grants, taxation and other charges. The **addressable element** is a percentage based on the elements which can be influenced by procurement or commissioning.

Property expenditure relates to the cost of maintaining and operating the premises from which council services are delivered. It does not include housing stock or capital expenditure or investment in property for other purpose.

Member allowances are based on rates of Basic and Special Responsibility payments published in transparency reporting. These costs are used to determine the likely cost of one or more new democratic structures in new authorities

FTE is calculated as a proportion of spend as supplied in public spending data. **Net revenue expenditure** is used to avoid double-counting any income or grant transfers. **Senior leadership** salaries are calculated across the top three organisational tiers as per transparency reporting.

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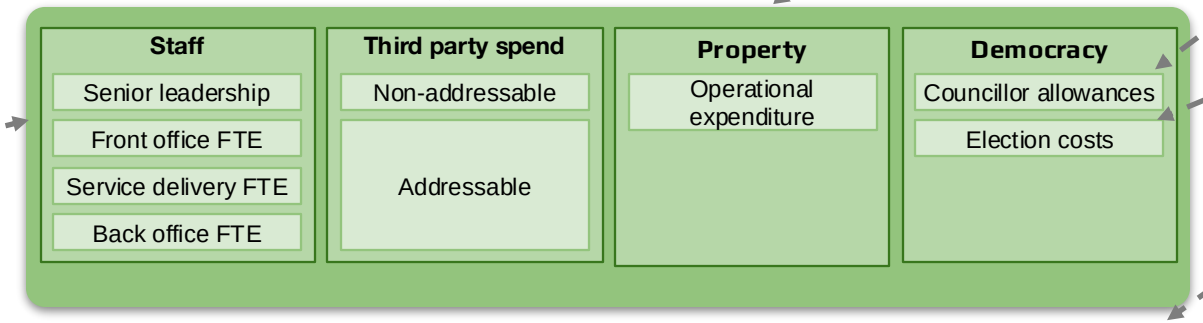
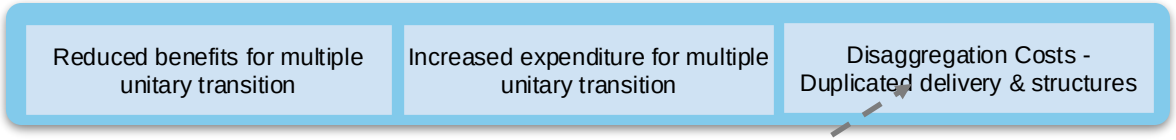


Election costs use a total of votes cast in a previous election cycle across district and county elections, and a cost-per-vote of £5.

Benefits are profiled to be fully effective in Year 5, to account for the need to complete staff changes and undertake contract renegotiations. The final model includes scenarios for stretch transformation which **increase the expected benefits through use of technology and service redesign**.

Redundancy costs do not include actuarial strain as this is highly individualised.



Costs such as creation of new councils, marketing, ICT and consultation are increased proportionately where more than one new council is to be formed. Similarly, fixed **benefits of transition** are shared across all new bodies.

Transition costs include anticipated redundancies due to duplicated leadership structures, and elements of one-off spending relating to creating, marketing and programme managing transition to a new council.

Disaggregation Costs are incurred where an option involves dividing a county level authority into two or more unitaries, and represents the ongoing cost of duplicating management and operations of statutory services, including social care and education. **An element of disaggregated costs therefore recur each year in options with more than one unitary authority.**

Aggregation – 1UA One Oxfordshire

Set out below is the view of the total benefits and costs of the reorganisation for the 1UA option. It is assumed that there are no recurring disaggregation costs as there are no duplicated senior leadership, service delivery and democratic costs as it maintains the same number of Upper Tier Level Authorities (UTLAs) in the area.

BENEFITS OF AGGREGATION

Category	Staffing Front Office	Staffing Service Delivery	Staffing Back Office	Staffing Management	Third Party Spend	Property	Democracy	**Total aggregation benefits (annual)**
Saving (£)	5,147,894	3,703,624	3,088,736	7,508,699	3,136,811	2,201,271	2,463,724	**27,250,759**

TRANSITION COSTS

Category	Programme transition costs	Redundancy costs	**Total transition costs (one-off)**
Cost (£)	17,990,364	5,834,686	**23,825,050**

DISAGGREGATION COSTS

Category	Additional senior leadership costs	Additional service delivery costs	Additional democratic costs	**Total disaggregation costs (annual)**
Cost (£)	0	0	0	**0**

NET BENEFITS

Total net benefit after one year	Total net benefit after five years	Payback period
-16,334,964	44,301,847	3.1 years

Aggregation - 2 UA

Set out below is the view of total benefits and costs of the reorganisation for the 2UA option. Disaggregation costs have been dampened to reflect the net neutral change in the number of Upper Tier Level Authorities (UTLAs) post reorganisation, from 2UAs to 2UAs with the inclusion of West Berkshire unitary authority.

BENEFITS OF AGGREGATION								
Category	Staffing Front Office	Staffing Service Delivery	Staffing Back Office	Staffing Management	Third Party Spend	Property	Democracy	**Total aggregation benefits (annual)**
Saving (£)	4,993,230	1,924,474	2,808,692	7,508,699	3,028,930	2,214,130	2,463,724	**24,941,879**

TRANSITION COSTS			
Category	Programme transition costs	Redundancy costs	**Total transition costs (one-off)**
Cost (£)	25,297,020	5,135,299	**30,432,319**

DISAGGREGATION COSTS				
Category	Additional senior leadership costs	Additional service delivery costs	Additional democratic costs	**Total disaggregation costs (annual)**
Cost (£)	0	3,058,000	0	**3,058,000**

NET BENEFITS		
Total net benefit after one year	Total net benefit after five years	Payback period
-24,909,667	16,632,379	4.2 years

Aggregation - 3 UA

Set out below is the view of total benefits and costs of the reorganisation for the 3UA assumption. Disaggregation costs have been dampened to reflect what may be typically expected from a 2U model neutral change in the number of Upper Tier Level Authorities (UTLAs) post reorganisation, from 2UAs to 3UAs with the inclusion of West Berkshire unitary authority. To note, certain programme transition costs have been further uplifted (e.g. creation of a new Council) to recognise the added complexity of redrawing boundaries under the 3UA option.

BENEFITS OF AGGREGATION

Category	Staffing Front Office	Staffing Service Delivery	Staffing Back Office	Staffing Management	Third Party Spend	Property	Democracy	**Total aggregation benefits (annual)**
Saving (£)	3,744,923	1,282,983	1,872,461	7,508,699	1,514,465	1,771,304	2,463,724	**20,158,559**

TRANSITION COSTS

Category	Programme transition costs	Redundancy costs	**Total transition costs (one-off)**
Cost (£)	28,155,420	4,322,720	**32,478,140**

DISAGGREGATION COSTS

Category	Additional senior leadership costs	Additional service delivery costs	Additional democratic costs	**Total disaggregation costs (annual)**
Cost (£)	3,137,107	7,549,159	445,300	**10,686,266**

NET BENEFITS

Total net benefit after one year	Total net benefit after five years	Payback period
-34,652,922	-35,513,074	8.7 years

Transformation Assumptions

Detailed below are the set of standard transformation assumptions, applied to the refined baseline of each reorganised unitary authorities' Net Revenue Expenditure. The refined Net Revenue Expenditure has already factored in the anticipated benefits from reorganisation.

Category	Transformation Assumptions	
	Base %	Stretch %
Front office Staffing	6%	10%
Service delivery Staffing	3%	5%
Back office Staffing	7%	8%
Third Party Spend	2.5%	3%
Income Generation	0%	1%

Standard Assumptions

In contrast to reorganisation, which is impacted by net change in upper tier level authorities pre-and post reorganisation, it is assumed that all future organisations have the similar potential for transformation at the Financial Options Appraisal level. The figures are then refined through a review of existing Policy and Transformation plans as part of the detailed Financial Case.

Transformation Opportunities: 1UA One Oxfordshire

Detailed below are the high-level transformation opportunities for One Oxfordshire. This does not take into account previous or ongoing transformation activity that has already taken place.

Category	Refreshed Baseline (£'000)	Base %	Base Savings (£'000)	Stretch %	Stretch Savings (£'000)
Front office Staffing	97,810	6%	5,869	10%	9,781
Service delivery Staffing	102,114	3%	3,063	5%	5,106
Back office Staffing	74,130	7%	5,190	8%	5,930
Third Party Spend	271,857	2.5%	6,796	3%	8,156
Income Generation	209,229	0%	0	1%	2,092
Total			**20,918**		**31,065**

Transformation Opportunities: 2UA

Detailed below are the high-level transformation opportunities for the future 2UA. This does not take into account of previous or ongoing transformation activity that has already taken place. The 2UA option includes West Berkshire in the expenditure baseline.

Category	Refreshed Baseline (£'000)	Base %	Base Savings (£'000)	Stretch %	Stretch Savings (£'000)
Front office Staffing	119,838	6%	7,190	10%	11,984
Service delivery Staffing	126,374	3%	3,791	5%	6,319
Back office Staffing	90,814	7%	6,357	8%	7,265
Third Party Spend	329,817	2.5%	8,245	3%	9,895
Income Generation	240,729	0%	0	1%	2,407
Total			**25,584**		**37,869**

Transformation Opportunities: 3UA

Detailed below are the high-level transformation opportunities for the future 3UA. This does not take into account of previous or ongoing transformation activity that has already taken place. The 3UA option includes West Berkshire in the expenditure baseline.

Category	Refreshed Baseline (£'000)	Base %	Base Savings (£'000)	Stretch %	Stretch Savings (£'000)
Front office Staffing	121,086	6%	7,265	10%	12,109
Service delivery Staffing	127,015	3%	3,810	5%	6,351
Back office Staffing	91,751	7%	6,443	8%	7,340
Third Party Spend	336,548	2.5%	8,330	3%	9,995
Income Generation	240,729	0%	0	1%	2,407
Total			**25,828**		**38,202**

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Transformation: Cost and Benefits Phasing

Transformation is anticipated to be delivered within the first five years of vesting day. It assumes that the benefits and costs are spread across the five year period, starting from 2028/29 (year 1). To note, there is an additional assumption that there is a one-off transformation cost set at 70% of base benefits.

Cost / Benefits Phasing					
	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5
Transformation benefits (recurring)	**0%**	**20%**	**50%**	**80%**	**100%**
Transformation costs (one-off)	**10%**	**15%**	**30%**	**30%**	**15%**

Benefits and Cost Summary	1UA One Oxfordshire (£'000)	2UA (£'000)	3UA (£'000)
Transformation Benefit (Base)	20,918	25,584	25,828
Transformation Cost (Assumed at 70% of Transformation Benefit)	14,652	17,909	18,070

Appendix 4

Key findings from the four strands of resident engagement (summer 2025)

Note: At the time of engagement One Oxfordshire was referred to as One Council: Your Oxfordshire.

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One Council, Your Oxfordshire

Feedback from the Oxfordshire Residents' Survey 2025 delivered by Marketing Means

Part 2:

Residents' perceptions of LGR

Feedback from the open survey hosted on Let's talk Oxfordshire

Part 3:

Feedback from focus group research delivered by REMind Research

Part 4:

Young people's perceptions of LGR

Feedback from sound board discussions

Part 1:

One Council, Your Oxfordshire

Feedback from the Oxfordshire Residents' Survey 2025

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the Local Government Reorganisation section of the Oxfordshire Residents' Survey 2025, conducted by independent research agency Marketing Means. This was conducted by post (including an online option) and face-to-face in-street, to gather the opinions of a reasonably representative sample of the general public. The survey was conducted between 26 June and 20 August 2025 and included questions designed to gather perspectives on local government reorganisation in the county and its potential impact. We collected a total of 1,203 responses and weighted these to the demographic profile of Oxfordshire residents by age, gender, and district.

The insight will join the analysis of results of other consultation exercises conducted by the council, all of which will be used to inform the council's final proposal for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire.

Key findings:

The main **perceived benefits of bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future**, taken from comments given in response to an open-ended question, were, in descending order of frequency:

Reduces costs/ More cost-effective

Comments relating to **increased efficiency, less duplication and wastage**, on themes such as:

- Greater efficiency/ Less time wasted
- Reduces duplication across activities/ tasks
- Everyone under one roof, staff working together/ more coordination
- Reduces job duplication/ headcount
- Shared knowledge from different councils/ departments

Comments relating to **Improved consistency and coherence across the council**, on themes such as:

- Consistency in process/ in the service residents receive/ fair distribution of resources
- Coherent/ clear view of situation/'singing from the same hymn sheet'

Having a single point of contact

The main **potential concerns regarding bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future**, taken from comments given in response to an open-ended question, were, in descending order of frequency:

Difficulties with local decision-making/ local knowledge/ representation/ consideration of local needs

Rural or smaller areas may be marginalised/ urban areas such as Oxford city will be prioritised

Comments related to **being overlooked by a larger council**, on themes such as:

- Remoteness / Less accessibility / Concerned over accessibility to a local office
- Services/ resources won't be fairly distributed/ ineffectively distributed

Concerns unitary council will be too big/ covers a vast area

Concerns over reduced services/ Services being cut or outsourced

Comments related to **staffing and management of the authority**, on themes such as:

- Redundancies/ Too few staff/ Need to retain staff knowledge
- Less accountability/supervision/ More corruption of power
- Poor management/ Poor quality of councillors or staff/ Becoming too self-serving

Comments related to **financial issues**, on themes such as:

- Financial savings won't be realised/ Harder to keep control of costs/ Costs will go up
- Change to unitary status will cost too much/ waste money/ Uncertainty over costs

We asked respondents to rate the relative importance of six different attributes in thinking about **how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate.**

Clear and accountable decision-making drew the highest importance ratings.

Two others were ranked closely together in second and third place for importance; **Strong financial resilience** and **Partnering with town and parish councils to bring decision-making closer to communities**.

Although still considered important overall, the two that were least likely to be rated as important were **Easy access for residents (one 'front door' for accessing all council services)**, and **Highly connected and able to drive innovation**.

We also asked respondents to rate how important three other specific **aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire were to them.**

Two of the three drew very similar high ratings for importance; **Minimising any disruption in services caused by separating them and Reducing duplication and running costs**.

The other, **Generating savings from streamlining services** was considered important overall, but by significantly fewer respondents than the first two aspects.

The main other points that residents made in regard to **how they felt local government in Oxfordshire can work better for them and their community in future**, taken from comments given in response to an open-ended question, were as follows, listed in descending order of frequency on mentions:

Comments related to **needing an authority that listened to residents, and sought opinion at a local level**, on themes such as:

- Important to engage with/ listen to local residents
- Local representation/connection is important/ Need to listen to local concerns

Need to improve travel schemes (e.g. LTNs) and travel infrastructure/ Improve parking

Improve efficiency/ Make savings/ reduce costs and wastage

Roads need to be maintained/repaired/ Potholes need to be fixed

Need to improve public transport and connections

Clear responsibilities/ accountability/ transparency

1. Introduction

1.1 Between Wednesday 25 June 2025 and Sunday 27 July 2025, Oxfordshire County Council invited comments on its interim proposal for a single unitary council for Oxfordshire as part of wider local government reorganisation across the country.

1.2 The open survey and its supporting communications campaign was targeted at county residents as opposed to stakeholders and is part of a multi-strand package of engagement including:

- The questions asked of residents as part of the council's annual representative residents' survey.
- Discussions with residents on local government reorganisation in focus group format, as part of the council's planned research programme to inform the development of its latest strategic plan.
- Discussions with secondary school children on local government reorganisation in sounding board format, as part of the council's planned research programme to inform the development of its latest strategic plan.
- Dedicated stakeholder engagement.

1.3 Only the results of the first listed above, the 2025 Residents' Survey, are reported here.

1.4 Collectively the insight from all the engagement summarised in paragraph 1.2 and from individual submissions will be used to inform the council's final proposal for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire.

2. Approach

- In June 2025, Oxfordshire County Council commissioned Marketing Means to undertake its 2025 residents' satisfaction survey. The survey followed on from similar exercises in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, and provides an opportunity to gauge residents' satisfaction with the council's services and the area in which they live, and included a section of questions on local government reorganisation, preceded by a short explanation of the options proposed for Oxfordshire.

- The survey was conducted in such a way as to be reasonably representative of the views of adults (18+) at a county-wide level.

- The survey was undertaken using a primarily postal approach with a printed questionnaire, supported by (i) the opportunity for recipients to take part online by creating a programmed version of the same questionnaire, and (ii) a face-to-face in-street version of the survey conducted by Marketing Means' interviewer team to help boost the proportion of responses from 18-34 and 35-44 year olds.

- **'Main' postal survey:** For the main postal survey, Marketing Means used the Royal Mail's UK Addresses software to access the Postcode Address File (PAF) of all residential addresses in the Oxfordshire County Council authority area, and so to generate a representative sample of households from across the county and its five districts. All 6,000 addresses selected for the 2024 wave of the survey were excluded from the selection to avoid contacting them again, and remaining addresses in the PAF file were stratified first by the five districts and then by postcode. We then took a 1 in n selection using an interval calculated to give a final total of 6,000 households. This method of selection assists with achieving a geographically representative response to the survey.

  – Marketing Means sent out a paper copy of the questionnaire, along with a covering letter and a C5 pre-paid business reply envelope to all households in the sample in w/c 23 June 2025. All residents in the sample could take part in the survey online if they wished, using unique login details included in the covering letter with a link to the online questionnaire. Marketing Means also provided a freephone helpline number facility for residents to use throughout fieldwork in case of any queries about the survey or requests for different formats.

  – Each questionnaire carried a unique ID number for identification purposes, to ensure reminder mailings were only sent to non-responders.

  – One reminder mailing (again promoting online participation and including a new paper copy of the survey) was sent to non-responders in w/c 28 July 2025. The final closing date for the survey was extended to 13 August 2025.

- **In-street face-to-face survey:** An in-street element of the survey was also included, aimed specifically at 18-34 and 35-44 year old residents. Having been briefed by our project manager, our regular team of face-to-face interviewers (provided by our partners at LG Personnel) undertook the in-street surveys, using a tablet version of the questionnaire programmed by Marketing Means to match the content of the postal survey.

– In-street surveys took place in Oxford (on seven dates), including the suburbs of Cowley, Headington and Summertown, and seven other towns, as agreed with the council's project manager, namely Abingdon (two dates), Banbury (two dates), Bicester (one date), Didcot (two dates), Wantage (one date), Carterton (one date), and Witney (two dates).

– All face-to-face fieldwork took place between 23 July and 10 August 2025. The team completed 178 face-to-face interviews with 18-44 year olds living in the county of Oxfordshire.

- Taking online, postal, and face-to-face responses together, a final total of 1,203 responses for this survey were received by the cut-off date of 20 August 2025. The response rates are as set out below:

	Sample size	Responses	Response rate[1]
Main postal survey	6,000	1,025 *(243 online, 782 postal)*	17.2%
Face-to-face survey	-	178	
TOTAL		**1,203**	

- Marketing Means produced this report in September 2025. Any press release or publication of the findings of this survey requires the approval of Marketing Means. Approval would only be refused if it were felt that the intended use would be inaccurate and/or a misrepresentation.

1 After removing 31 non-contactable addresses returned by Royal Mail as 'incomplete address', 'no built yet', 'inaccessible' or similar.

3. Respondent profile - Residents' Survey

Table 1: Residents' survey respondent profile (unweighted)

	Residents' Survey respondents (Oxfordshire residents only)		Actual % in Oxfordshire's population
Age band			
	(number)	(%)	
18 - 24	30	3%	11%
25 - 34	141	12%	17%
35 - 44	142	12%	17%
45 - 54	146	13%	17%
55 - 64	199	17%	15%
65 - 74	222	19%	12%
75 or older	261	23%	11%
Prefer not to say	62		
Not answered	0		
Sex			
	(number)	(%)	
Female	610	54%	51%
Male	514	46%	49%
I use another term	3		
Prefer not to say	89		
Not answered	0		
Ethnic group			
	(number)	(%)	
Asian or Asian British	38	3%	5%
Black or Black British	28	2%	2%
Chinese	10	1%	1%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	12	1%	3%
White	1,022	91%	87%
Other ethnic group/background	11	1%	2%
Prefer not to say	152		
Not answered	18		
Long term illness or disability			
	(number)	(%)	
Yes	303	28%	15%
No	794	72%	85%
Prefer not to say	85		
Not answered	21		

4. Main findings

Perceived benefits of bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future

4.1 At the start of the LGR section of the Residents' survey (Q21) all participants were asked:

'What do you think are the benefits of bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?'

4.2 We received 951 responses to this question. Many people providing feedback covering several topics.

4.3 Our coding of the comments, to the most common themes that emerged is summarised in the chart overleaf.

4.4 Overall, the single most likely single theme to be mentioned was Reduces costs/ Cost effective, by 26%.

Comments included:

"If this saves money and brings efficiencies in running the county, then this is a good idea."

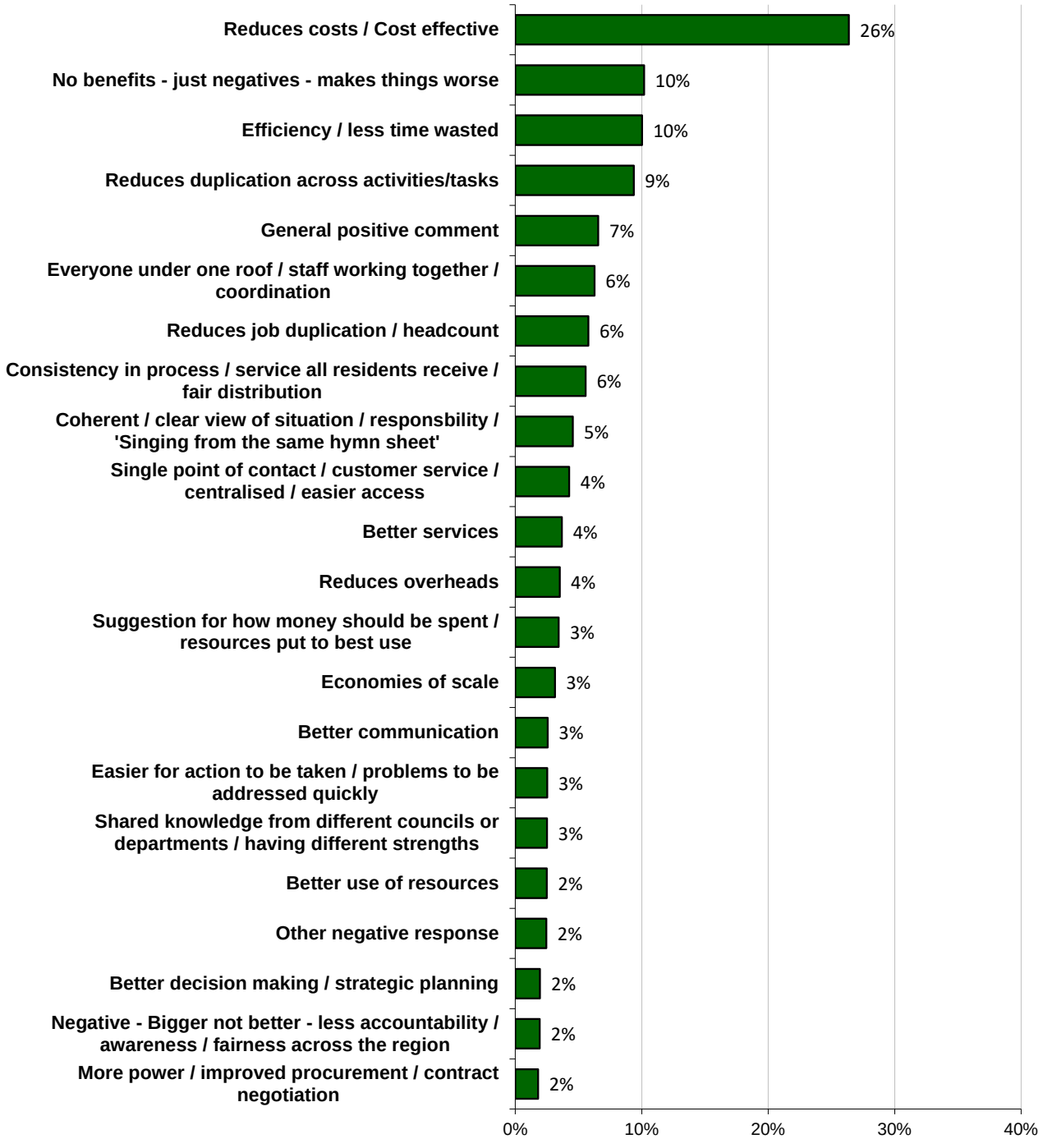
"Bring down cost and lower bills."

"Cost reduction and economies of scale."

"Cheaper to run services."

"Costs might be reduced."

Chart 2: Perceived benefits of bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future.



Source: Marketing Means 2025 Base: All responmdents (1,203)

4.5 A related but broader theme of operational efficiency, reducing duplication and waste, also drew many responses. Most likely was Efficiency/ less time wasted, given by 10%, then Reduces duplication across activities/ tasks (given by 9%), Everyone under one roof, staff working together/ more coordination (6%), Reduces job duplication/ headcount (6%) and Shared knowledge from different councils/departments (3%).

Comments included:

"Could be more efficient."

"Could reduce duplication, improve efficiency."

"More efficient and joined up."

"Must be better and more efficient, perhaps some services can be amalgamated."

"Not so many people doing same job but for different areas."

"Save on building costs and less staff."

"Reduces duplication of work and resources."

"Reduction in duplication and waste, ability to find links and opportunities for collaboration across departments."

"Reduction in overhead. No passing between councils. One stop shop."

"Better coordination; fewer city vs county squabbles. Communication might improve if there are fewer different departments."

"Perhaps save money on admin/duplicated roles, allowing for more services available to more people."

"One management team/structure/cost, with a birds eye view of all services and costs."

"More unity and equality across services with chances to save costs and the benefit of sharing knowledge and expertise in planning and strategy."

"Lack of duplication, sharing resources, reduce maintenance costs on office buildings."

4.6 Some respondents mentioned the benefit of a Single point of contact (4%).

Comments included:

"Less confusion about who to contact."

"It would be easier to know who to contact with one council."

"Instead of making several calls to different councils (as each one denies it's their problem) issues should be dealt with in one call."

4.7 Some also mentioned the notion of improved consistency and coherence across the council. Consistency in process/ in the service residents receive/ fair distribution of resources was mentioned by 6%, while almost as many mentioned Coherent/ clear view of situation/'singing from the same hymn sheet'.

Comments included:

"In an ideal world, it would reduce costs, improve efficiency, and promote consistency."

"In theory it should reduce costs by providing greater integration between services and uniformity of provision across the county."

"Less duplication and postcode lottery for services. Bigger contracts for services is likely to reduce cost of these."

"Maybe Henley would be better served than now."

"Less confusing."

"Presumably less red tape? Easier to know which council to approach for which service."

4.8 One in 10 respondents expressed a negative view here, with theme giving the theme **No benefits/ Just negatives/ Makes things worse** expressed by 10%.

Comments included:

"Rubbish, another con!"

"There are no benefits due to the amount if duties that will result from unifying the councils which will overwhelm the unified councils and will result in a mediocre service."

"There will be no change just more confusion between departments."

"We do not believe it will cater for the shires, we can see no benefits."

4.9 The following word cloud visualisation highlights the most used words in participants' answer to the question *'What do you think are the benefits of bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?'*. After removing common supporting words (Oxfordshire, service, benefit etc.) and stop words (it, the etc.), it reinforces the key themes of efficiency and cost savings and simplification as shown in the more detailed thematic analysis.

Word cloud visualisation of the benefits of a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future, based on the Residents' survey results:

Potential concerns regarding bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future

4.10 The second open question in the LGR section (Q22) asked all participants:

4.11 'What, if anything, concerns you about bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?'

4.12 We received comments from 893 respondents.

4.13 Our coding of the comments, to the most common themes that emerged is summarised in the chart overleaf.

4.14 The single most likely theme to arise was concerns over whether local needs would be recognised, with 14% giving comments relating to **Difficulties with local decision-making/ local knowledge/ representation/ consideration of local needs**.

Comments included:

"Lack of local decision making in Oxford City which has the largest area of deprivation."

"A lack of local focus on services."

"Amplification of problems and the loss of ability to deal with local area issues if not consolidated properly with lots of review and thought by the right people."

"Bigger, less locally focused, more bureaucratic, less agile, less accountable, faceless entity."

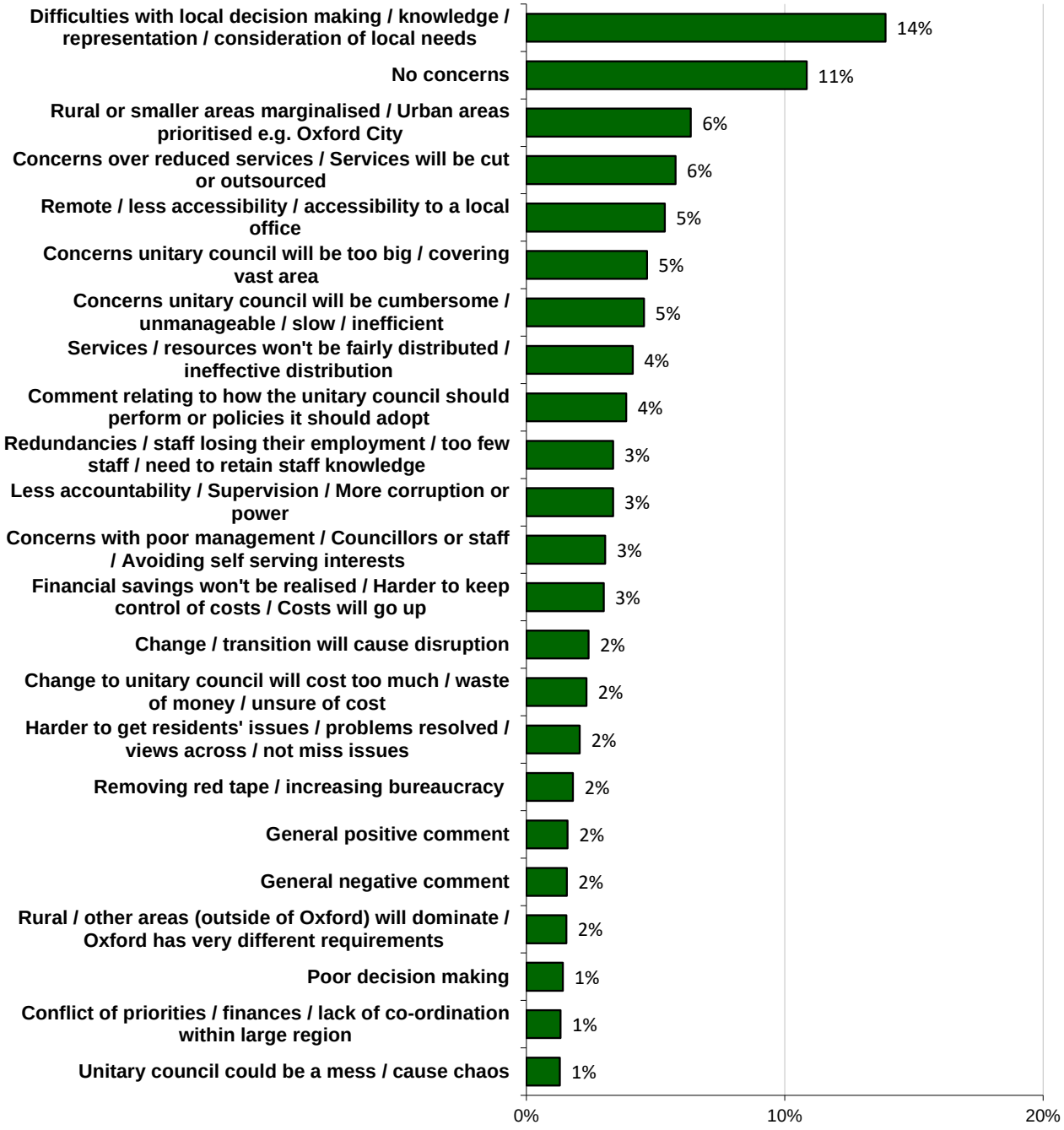
"Concern that local issues will be more remote and will not served so well in a larger council area."

"Could be chaotic, loss of local knowledge."

"Different parts of the area require very different approaches - services eg rural vs urban."

"Encroaching of towns and cities into countryside. Prioritisation of towns and cities over rural communities."

Chart 3: Potential concerns regarding bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future.



Source: Marketing Means 2025 Base: All responmdents (1,203)

4.15 Some were worried that Rural or smaller areas may be marginalised/ urban areas such as Oxford city will be prioritised (6%).

Comments included:

"Ensure areas don't get overlooked (distant from Oxford)."

"Everything gets concentrated on the city centre. Having had some experience of Milton Keynes and Bracknell Forest unitary councils I am aware that small towns and villages get low priority - those residents feel ignored and forgotten about. They hate the change to unitary authorities."

"I fear it will create a bigger gap between town / cities and rural areas."

"Oxford city and the south prioritised. Limited local knowledge and poorer services for rural north Oxfordshire."

4.16 Some were also concerned over **Remoteness / Less accessibility / (Concerned over accessibility to a local office** (5%). Similarly some felt that **Services/ resources won't be fairly distributed/ ineffectively distributed** (4%)

Comments included:

"Perhaps less personal."

"Remoteness - no longer have local representation or local knowledge."

"Representation may be less effective. Harder to get in touch with councillors and harder for councillors to have any impact on processes. Councillors will all be rural Tories or Reform and council swill become socially regressive. ODS might be disbanded."

"Some areas falling through the gaps. Less easy to contact someone. Council service providers losing touch with the people they are serving."

"That all countries are treated equally."

4.17 Some expressed concerns over the size of the council's coverage – **Concerns unitary council will be too big/ covers a vast area** (given by 5%).

Comments included:

"Some services may become too broad to cover all areas of the county, for example waste requirements all districts should have garden waste collections."

"Staff have to travel miles to cover a huge area, organisational change will be a nightmare, expected savings unlikely to materialise, lack of a local touch."

"Losing the local focus as Oxfordshire in a big county with very needs e.g. city, rivers, roads, parks, services."

"Large organisations may be less in touch with local matters and individuals working there may feel less responsible."

"Lack of local community connection, generalisation of needs obfuscates specific local requirements and issues, larger shop, harder to correct course if direction isn't working."

4.18 Service delivery was a potential issue for some, with 6% expressing **Concerns over reduced services/ Services being cut or outsourced**.

Comments included:

"Lack of priority for issues outside Oxford, temptation to outsource services."

"Loss of existing services, we are on edge of the county and rural."

"Loss of local services eg centralised recycling centres, further to travel for services. Losing the nuances of what villages, towns and the city need - all very different challenges."

4.19 Several related themes dealt with how staffing and management of the authority might be affected. **Redundancies/ Too few staff/ Need to retain staff knowledge** was mentioned by 3%. Some feared **Less accountability/supervision/ More corruption of power** (3%), while 3% expressed concerns over **Poor management/ Poor quality of councillors or staff/ Becoming too self-serving**.

Comments included:

"Need for savings will involve staffing and service cuts."

"Not making anyone redundant."

"Insufficient staffing with a heavily centralised approach."

"Pooled funding hides things."

"Corruption . Not listening to local views."

"Disorganisation and lack of accountability and Marxist threats."

"Disorganised, expensive, chaotic nature of public services. It will take 80 years and cost £3.2 billion."

4.20 Concerns related to **financial issues included Financial savings won't be realised/ Harder to keep control of costs/ Costs will go up** (given by 3%) and **Change to unitary status will cost too much/ waste money/ Uncertainty over costs** (also given by 3%).

Comments included:

"Despite the promise of reduced costs, this *won't happen. More cuts to services will still happen and people suffering lack of support and/or funding will struggle more."*

"Don't trust a larger organisation to keep control of costs. Less accountability."

"Increased costs to individuals i.e. if one of the existing councils charges more for a service all may follow! E.g. garden waste fees."

"Initial cost of implementation and disruption during transition."

4.21 Just over one in 10 respondents (11%) noted that they had **No concerns** about the possible move to a unitary authority. Comments included:

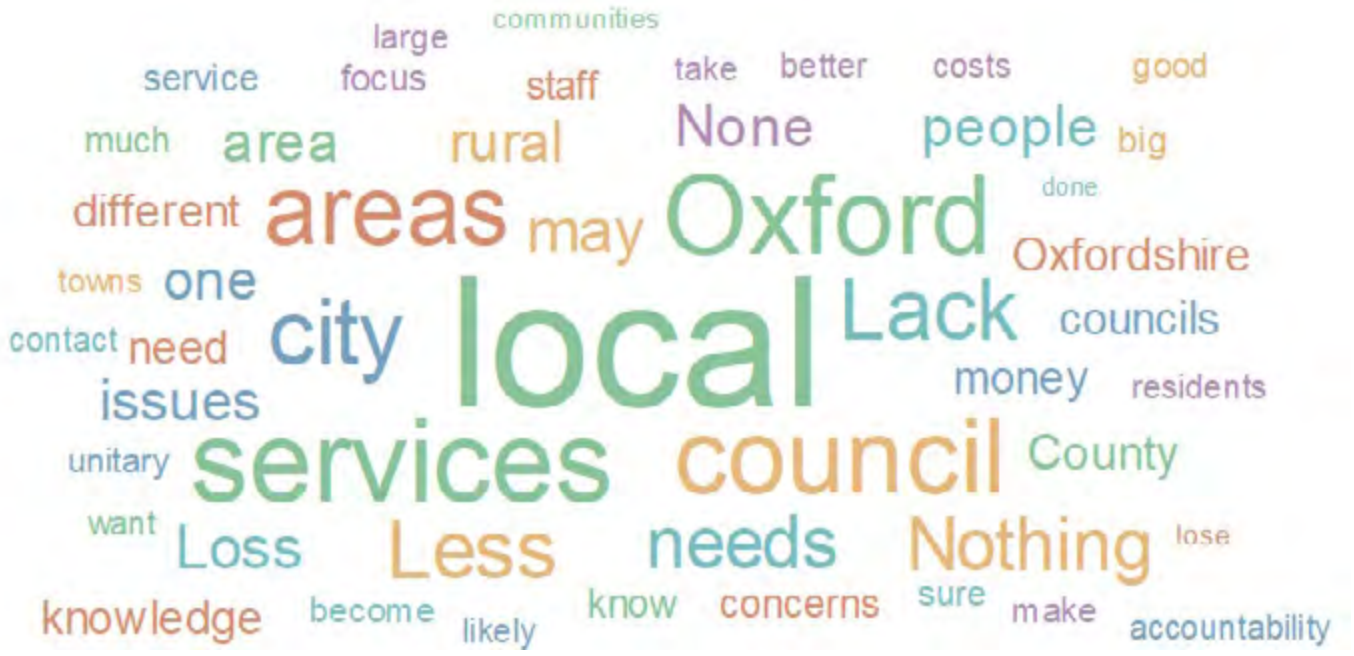
"No I think it would be a logical decision to make."

"Nothing - if you don't try you just get the same."

"Nothing particular provided it can be efficiently delivered."

4.22 The following word cloud visualisation for Q22 highlights the most used words in participants' answer to the question *'What, if anything, concerns you about bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?*

Word cloud visualisation of potential concerns associated with a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future, from the Residents' survey:



Relative importance of different attributes in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate

4.23 The LGR section of the Residents' Survey included two closed questions, inviting respondents to give a specific rating of their perceived importance of a short series of factors.

4.24 The first of the questions set out six different potential operational attributes of a unitary authority . Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each on a scale from 1= Not important at all to 10 = Extremely important.

4.25 On the following pages, we show the mean scores awarded by respondents to each attribute, as well as the mode and median of the distribution of scores, and finally the full distribution of respondents' scores from 1 to 10 across each of the six attributes.

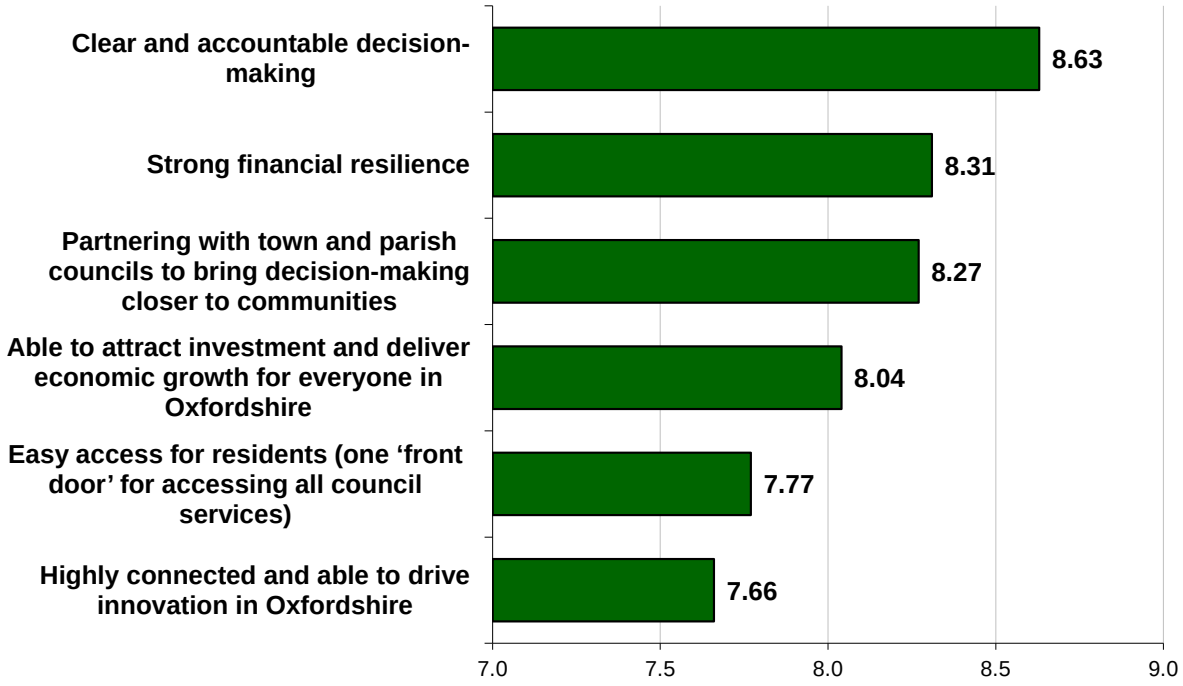
4.26 "**Clear and accountable decision-making**" is the aspect given significantly higher importance than any other. This aspect drew the highest mean score of 8.63, and highest proportion of respondents who gave it the top score of 10 (46%).

4.27 Two statements are ranked closely together in second and third place. First of those is "**Strong financial resilience,**" given a mean score of 8.31 and receiving a score to 10 from 40%. Next is "**Partnering with town and parish councils to bring decision-making closer to communities**", which drew an only slightly lower mean score of 8.27, and was given the top score of 10 by 37%.

4.28 Two aspects drew significantly lower rating than others but were still widely considered as important. "**Easy access for residents (one 'front door' for accessing all council services**)" drew a mean score of 7.77 and was given the top rating of 10 by 33%. "**Highly connected and able to drive innovation**" received the lowest mean score of 7.66, and was given a score of 10 by 25%.

Chart 1: The average 'mean' scores for each 'operational' attribute tested

On a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are each of the following in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate?



Source: Marketing Means 2025 Base: All respondents (1,122 to 1,143)

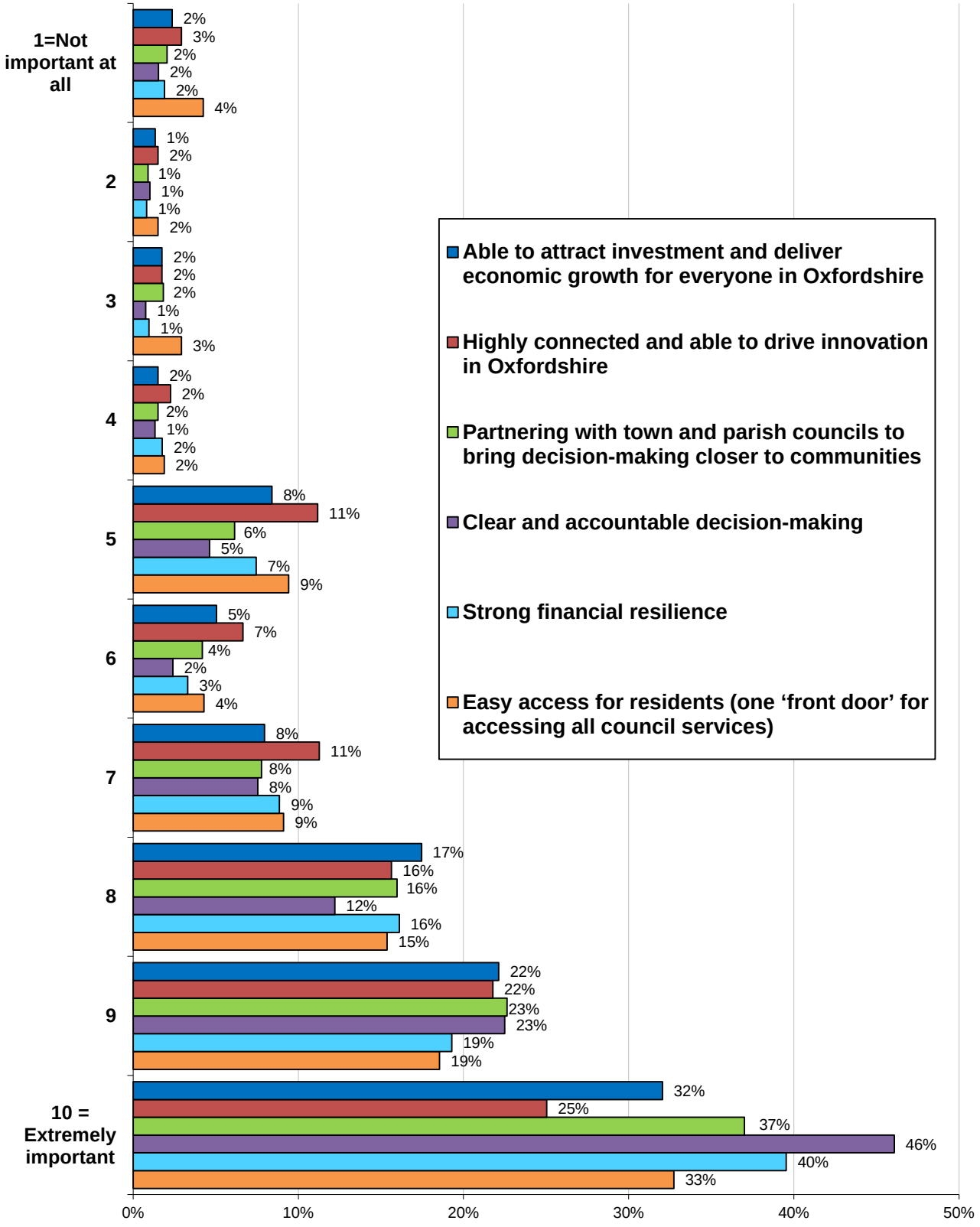
Table 4: Scores for each 'operational' attribute tested (mean, mode and median)

On a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are each of the following in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate?

	Easy access for residents (one 'front door') for accessing all council services	Strong financial resilience	Clear and accountable decision making	Partnering with town and parish councils to bring decision making closer to communities	Highly connected and able to drive innovation in Oxfordshire	Able to attract investment and deliver economic growth for everyone in Oxfordshire
Mean - the average of a set of numbers. Add up all the values and divide by the number of values.	7.77	8.31	8.63	8.27	7.66	8.04
Mode - the value that appears most frequently in a set of numbers.	10	10	10	10	10	10
Median -the middle value in a set of numbers when they are arranged in order. If there is an even number of values, it is the average of the two middle numbers.	9	9	9	9	8	9

Chart 2: Distribution of responses for each attribute tested

On a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are each of the following in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate?



Source: Marketing Means 2025 Base: Valid responses

Relative importance of aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to residents.

4.29 The next of the quantitative questions relating to local government reorganisation asked respondents to rate how important each of three aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire were to them, using the same scale as the previous question, from 1 = Not important at all to 10 = Extremely important.

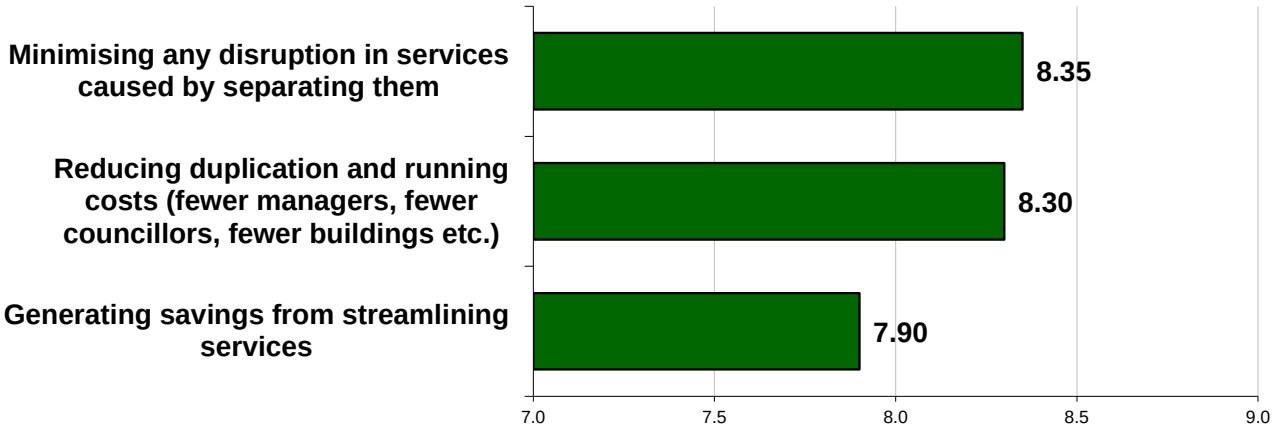
4.30 On the following pages, we show the mean scores awarded by respondents to each attribute, as well as the mode and median of the distribution of scores, and finally the full distribution of respondents' scores from 1 to 10 across each of the six attributes.

4.31 All three were generally considered important but two of the three attributes listed drew the highest, and very similar, mean scores. "**Minimising any disruption in services caused by separating them**" received the highest mean score of 8.35, and was given the top score of 10 by 39%. "**Reducing duplication and running costs**" drew a mean score of 8.30 and was the most likely to receive the top rating of 10, from 40%,

4.32 The attribute, "**Generating savings from streamlining services**" was still considered important but drew a lower mean score of 7.90 while being given the top score of 10 by 32%.

Chart 3: The average 'mean' scores for each 'operational' attribute tested

Question 4: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?



Source: Marketing Means 2025 Base: All respondents (1,129 to 1,144)

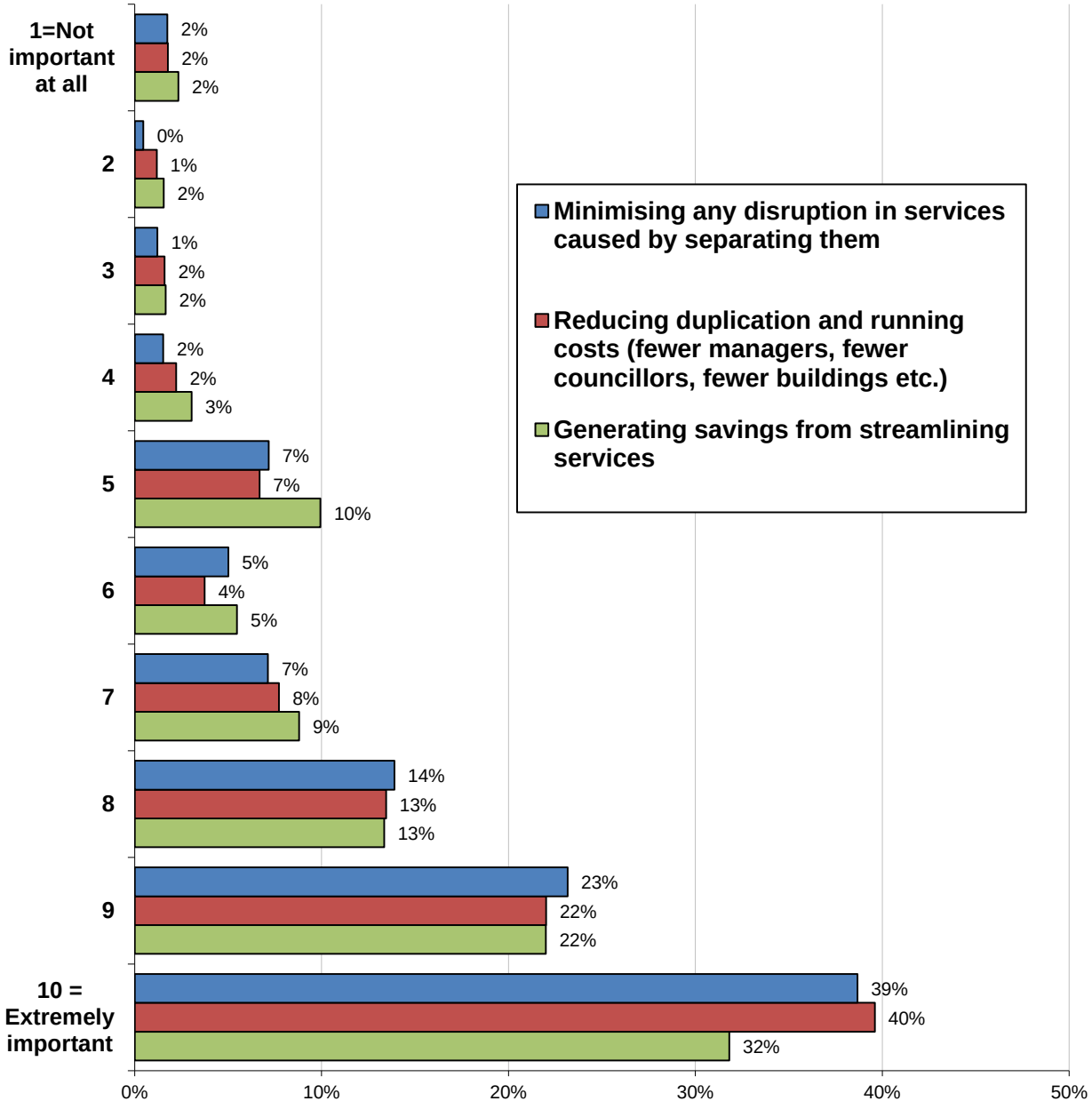
Table 6: Scores for each 'operational' attribute tested (mean, mode and median)

Question 4: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?

	Generating savings from streamlining services	Reducing duplication and running costs (fewer managers, fewer councillors, fewer buildings etc.)	Minimising any disruption in services caused by separating them
Mean - the average of a set of numbers. Add up all the values and divide by the number of values.	7.90	8.30	8.35
Mode - the value that appears most frequently in a set of numbers.	10	10	10
Median -the middle value in a set of numbers when they are arranged in order. If there is an even number of values, it is the average of the two middle numbers.	9	9	9

Chart 2: Distribution of responses for each attribute tested

Q24: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?



Source: Marketing Means 2025 Base: Valid responses

How can local government in Oxfordshire work better for you and your community in the future.

4.33 The final open-ended question in the LGR section of the Residents' Survey (Q25) was:

'Is there anything else you would like to say about how local government in Oxfordshire can work better for you and your community in the future?'

4.34 We received comments from 559 people in response to this question.

4.35 Our coding of the comment to the most common themes that emerged is summarised in the chart overleaf, noting that almost half of all respondents (49%) made no further comments at all.

4.36 The themes arising were scattered across a range of topics, but among the most likely were some that echoed concerns raised at Q22, related to needing an authority that listened to resident and sought their opinion at a local level. **Important to engage with/ listen to residents** was given by 5%, while 3% mentioned **Local representation/connection is important/ Need to listen to local concerns.**

Comments included:

"Send 6-monthly questionnaires, to gain public's view on what they want, what they don't because the majority of the public are unable to attend meetings, majority of the public are unable to attend meetings. Actually listen to the public's concerns."

"When asking for community views - take notice of the results."

"Each town and village must feel listened to."

"Instead of sending out costly survey material getting out and about speaking to people on the streets."

"Keep listening to the local people and then taking note of their ? and local issues. Keep local government local!"

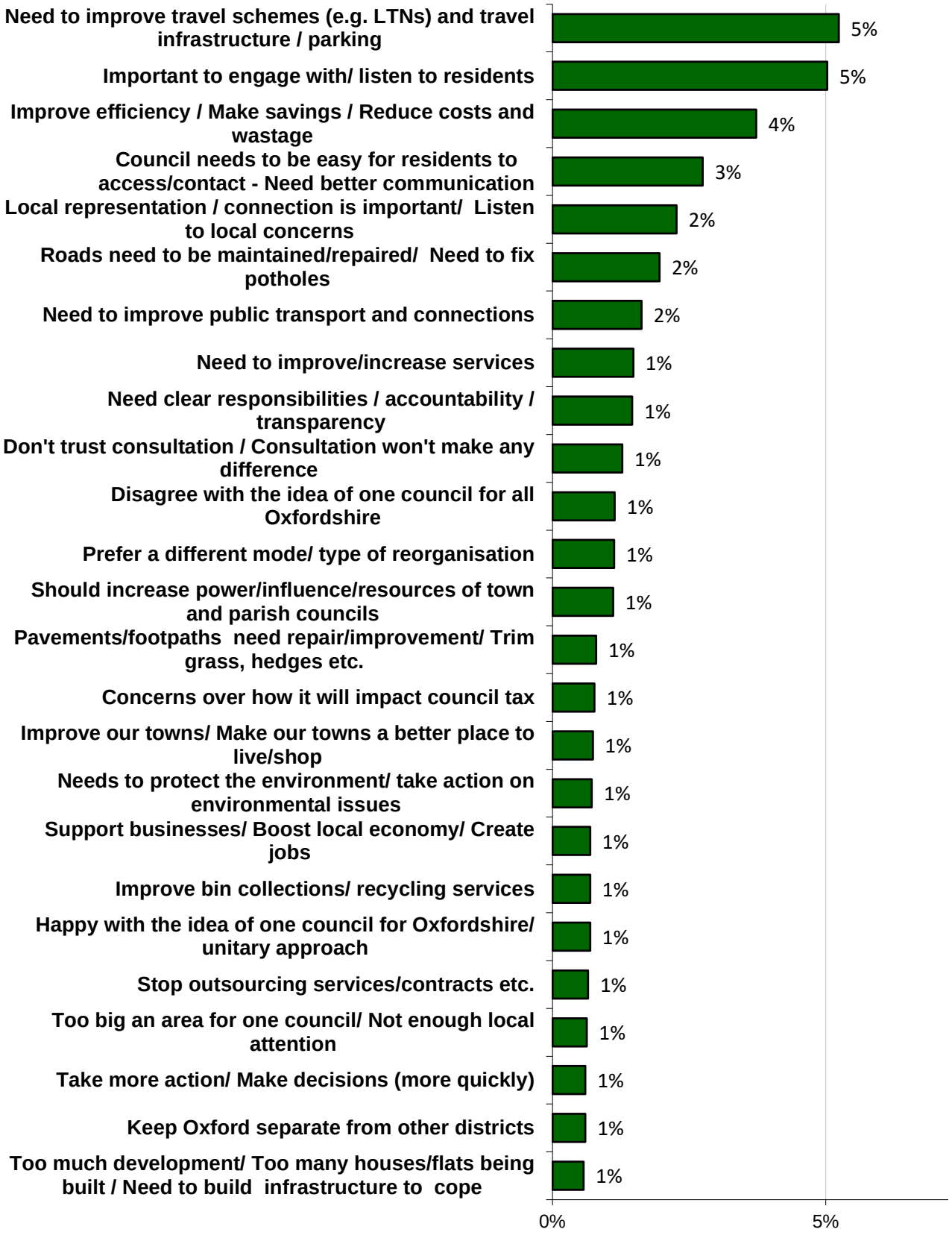
"Listen to local concerns, not ignore them and pretend everything is good."

"Listen to the people who elected you/whom you represent. Think about and respond to their needs."

"Listening to residents views - not just tick boxing for consultation etc."

"More attention of and attendance at Parish Council meetings by Councillors."

Chart 6: Comments about how local government in Oxfordshire can work better for people and communities in the future.



Source: Marketing Means 2025 Base: All responmdents (1,203)

4.37 Another frequent concern related to communication with/from the council, with 3% requesting that the council Needs to be easy for residents to access/contact/ Better communication to residents.

Comments included:

"Making sure that everyone through local media - radio, tv, are made aware what is happening in local government."

"Need access to people to discuss things."

"Single easy to use web site to access services."

"To avoid residents having to struggle to get to the right person responsible for the area they are concerned about or need help with. I have known for myself bureaucratic processes that have taken up a large amount of effort and time to get completed, what on the surface, is a simple issue."

"Better and clearer communication on how money is being spent and improvement plans for Thame."

"Local government states it wants more volunteers to help support its services. Unfortunately it does not recognise that many fewer people are volunteering and the extreme levels of bureaucracy and bad communication are discouraging."

4.38 A related theme saw 1% highlight that they would like to see **Increased power/ influence/resources for smaller town/ parish councils**.

Comments included:

"Giving Parish Councils a greater say in development /maintenance in their local area."

"Listen to local parish councils for local area issues, Oxfordshire County Council, should provide and manage large scale operations, libraries etc. but use the parish councils, or local councillors to effect changes."

"More power to town councils."

"Need power for local parish councils too."

"Work with local communities particularly in rural towns and communities."

4.39 A frequently mentioned but broad theme was the **Need to improve travel schemes (e.g. LTNs) and travel infrastructure/ Improve parking** (given by 5%).

Comments included:

"Better and safer streets and parking space for anyone."

"We should be a modern thriving society looking forward to the future and not being a nesting place for retirement and blanket 20mph speed limits."

"Proper consultation on decisions about LTNs etc.. needs to be the norm. Blanket 20mph areas are not necessary. They should be set as a highway need not local politics. Wales is a great example of how not to do it."

"Paths and verges. Stop cars parking on them also make it easier to do something about it."

"Prioritise transport as many of us live here to commute. Traffic needs to improve. Please reduce impact of roadworks (can you do in school holiday or at night?)."

"Open the city back up to people who want to pop into Blackwells to pick up a book and drive home again in a few minutes instead of a few hours. The persecution of motorists is very frustrating particularly easy access to Hospitals."

"Stop wasting money on speed limits that don't work."

"Address the situation with LTNs as they cause more traffic than good. They cause more cars to be on the ring road or less direct routes for more time and lead to traffic - more traffic and longer journeys = more pollution."

"Charge for out of town parking convenience. Lower charges for town centre parking."

4.40 Another 2% mentioned the **Need to improve public transport and connections**.

Comments included:

"Becoming a mayorship with direct say on national investment in Oxfordshire, e.g. A34 becomes expressway with a speed from Chieveley to Bicester, integration of public transport, e.g. Cowley rail and transport from Oxford."

"Better transport links - no buses at all through our village!"

"Finally resolve the transport issues that have plagued Oxford for the entire 45 years that I have lived here, and that means much greater pedestrianisation of central Oxford (how beautiful that would make it!) and properly linking Oxford railway station with the central city!"

"Give us back a proper bus service again as not everyone in a small village can drive and all children of working age could get to work and college."

"Increase public transport please."

4.41 Also related to travel, some mentioned a concern that occurs frequently in residents' surveys, **Roads need to be maintained/ repaired/ Potholes need to be fixed** (given by 2%).

Comments included:

"Stop wasting money patching up roads, paths, using sub-standard materials to cowboy outfits."

"Fix the pot holes and pavements."

"Roads are worse than I've ever seen them."

"Roads are an absolute disgrace that shames our County and continually patching them is not working."

"Please fix the roads! That sole is issue is destroying trust in your allocation of funding."

"Have someone in power monitoring the state of our roads and checking that pot-holes have been repaired properly, not just throwing a bucket of tar down the hole."

4.42 One of the most frequent themes given was the need for any changes to **Improve efficiency/ Make savings/ reduce costs and wastage** (given by 4%).

Comments included:

"Get rid of all high flyers that take high wages and pensions greedy."

"Give us more information about the services you offer and make them more efficient."

"If you bring in contractors to oversee certain services, then take top tier management away!"

"Improve budgeting , and value for money

contracts. Efficiencies in coordinating roadworks on all levels."

"Lot of duplication - work can be saved."

"Prioritising the headcount can be reduced and genuine savings can be made I am in favour of the change to a unitary authority."

"Reduce financial wastage. Pay too much for contracts, seen as an 'easy target' for high quotes."

4.43 On a similar operational theme, some highlighted the need for **Clear responsibilities/ accountability/ transparency** (given by 1%).

Comments included:

"Prevent corruption is very important. Need to have mechanisms to overlook the whole system."

"More transparency on LTNs and science of research"

"Local government should be open and clear decisions should be scrutinised to eradicate coercion, fraud and corruption."

"Less corruption. This was clear with the equestrian planning in Tadmarton after ISO+ objections to the application. This was ignored."

"Increase visibility, transparency and accountability."

"There needs to be better accountability for decisions and actions. Better communication about priorities etc from the Council would be beneficial."

4.44 The following word cloud visualisation for Q25 highlights the most used words in participants' answer to the question *'What, if anything, concerns you about bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?*

Word cloud visualisation of how local government in Oxfordshire can work better for residents and their community in the future, from the Residents' survey:

Part 2:

One Council, Your Oxfordshire

Feedback from the open survey hosted on Let's talk Oxfordshire

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings from an open survey conducted by Oxfordshire County Council between 25 June 2025 and 27 July 2025, designed to gather perspectives on local government reorganisation in the county and its potential impact.

The open survey, and its accompanying communications activity, was deployed to support the understanding of, and engagement with, plans for reorganisation of Oxfordshire's councils. The survey and communications activity was predominantly targeted at county residents as opposed to a stakeholder audience, and is part of a multi-strand package of engagement including:

- The same questions asked of residents as part of the council's annual representative residents' survey.
- Discussions with residents on local government reorganisation in focus group format, as part of the council's planned research programme to inform the development of its latest strategic plan.
- Discussions with secondary school children on local government reorganisation in sounding board format, as part of the council's planned research programme to inform the development of its latest strategic plan.
- Dedicated stakeholder engagement.

Collectively the insight from all this engagement will be used inform the council's final proposal for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire.

Key findings:

- A total of 1,344 individuals participated in the survey, including 1,275 Oxfordshire residents, 17 members of the public living outside Oxfordshire, and 46 stakeholders.
- Although not all survey participants, provided demographic information it appears that most respondents were older adults (69% aged 55 and over) and identified as male (58%). There was an overrepresentation of respondents identifying as 'white' (96%) and those with long-term illnesses or disabilities (21%) compared with the county's profile.
- The most frequently cited benefit of Oxfordshire County Council's interim proposal for local government reorganisation in the county was increased efficiency and streamlining of services, mentioned 421 times. Respondents highlighted the potential for reduced duplication, improved coordination, and a more joined-up approach to governance.
- Cost savings were also a significant theme, with 383 mentions. Some respondents believed that a single unitary council could lead to financial efficiencies and better use of public funds.
- Other notable benefits included clearer accountability and responsibility (179 mentions) and a single point of contact for residents (140 mentions).
- The most dominant concern of Oxfordshire County Council's interim proposal for local government reorganisation in the county was balancing the diverse needs of different areas within Oxfordshire, mentioned

262 times. Loss of local knowledge and disconnection from communities was another notable concern, with 218 mentions. Some respondents worried that a larger, centralised authority would be less attuned to the specific needs of smaller towns and rural areas.

- Other concerns included the potential for increased costs, negative impacts on service quality, and reduced accountability.

- When exploring quantitatively the relative importance of different attributes for future unitary councils, clear and accountable decision-making was rated as the most important attribute, with a mean score of 8.69. Strong financial resilience followed closely, with a mean score of 8.37. Partnering with town and parish councils was also highly valued, with a mean score of 8.01.

- Minimising disruption in services during reorganisation was the most important area of focus for local government reorganisation, from the three attributes tested quantitatively, with a mean score of 7.67. However, both reducing duplication and running costs (mean score of 7.58) and generating savings from streamlining services (mean score of 7.36) were also highly valued.

1. Introduction

1.1 Between Wednesday 25 June 2025 and Sunday 27 July 2025, Oxfordshire County Council invited comments on its interim proposal for a single unitary council for Oxfordshire as part of wider local government reorganisation across the country.

1.2 The open survey and its supporting communications campaign was targeted at county residents as opposed to stakeholders and is part of a multi-strand package of engagement including:

- The same questions asked of residents as part of the council's annual representative residents' survey.
- Discussions with residents on local government reorganisation in focus group format, as part of the council's planned research programme to inform the development of its latest strategic plan.
- Discussions with secondary school children on local government reorganisation in sounding board format, as part of the council's planned research programme to inform the development of its latest strategic plan.
- Dedicated stakeholder engagement.

1.3 During the engagement period, the Let's talk Oxfordshire page was visited 12,557 times, by 7,718 visitors. Overall, 1,344 people completed the online survey.

1.4 In addition, one member of the public wrote to the council to propose an alternative model for the local government in the county. Specifically, they suggested a possible compromise where Greater Oxford becomes a Strategic Unitary Authority, while the surrounding rural areas retain a form of district-like governance. Through this alternative model they aim to balance the need for economic development with local governance continuity.

1.5 Collectively the insight from all the engagement summarised in paragraph 1.2 and from individual submissions will be used to inform the council's final proposal for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire.

2. Approach

2.1 All survey participants were provided with high level contextual information on local government reorganisation, including:

- Why the government wants to simplify local government.
- How local government is currently organised in Oxfordshire, including the types of services provided by different councils.
- High level information on three interim proposals for local government organisation in Oxfordshire.
- Signposts to Oxfordshire County Council's website for more information.

Survey participants were encouraged to read this information before sharing their feedback.

2.2 Feedback was collated using an online feedback form on Let's talk Oxfordshire. The exercise was targeted at residents, although stakeholders could use this tool to engage with the council regarding local government reorganisation and a small number chose to do so.

2.3 This engagement opportunity was widely promoted predominantly to county residents alongside the council's local government reorganisation and devolution webpages. A range of communications channels were used including organic and paid for social media advertising, e-newsletters, posters, internal communications for council staff and councillors and media engagement.

3. Respondent profile

3.1 Overall, 1,344 people responded to the LGR online survey hosted on Let's talk Oxfordshire, this included:

- 1,275 Oxfordshire residents
- 17 members of the public living outside of Oxfordshire
- 46 stakeholders.

3.2 While some residents chose not to provide their demographic details or postcode details, for those we do have information for, overall:

- More men (58%) responded than women (42%), Oxfordshire's population is more evenly balanced.
- Older generations were significantly more likely to engage with this survey, with 69 per cent of respondents who were county residents aged 55 years and over).
- Survey respondents were more likely to identify their ethnic group as 'white' (96 per cent overall, an overrepresentation compared to Oxfordshire's population.
- 21 per cent of respondents stated that they had long-term illness or disability, which impacted them either a little or a lot, again an overrepresentation (14%) compared to Oxfordshire's population.
- People from across Oxfordshire responded to the survey, with the strongest spikes in response from people living in OX2 and OX14.

3.3 3.3 The map on the following page shows the distribution of responses geographically and the following table shows the respondent profile, against Oxfordshire's population.

3.4 Please note that the views expressed by different segments of respondents have not been disaggregated in the main findings section of this report. Targeted engagements have been organised to capture views from specific types of respondents as set out in paragraph 1.2.

Map 1: Geographical distribution of responses

Consultation response by postcode district

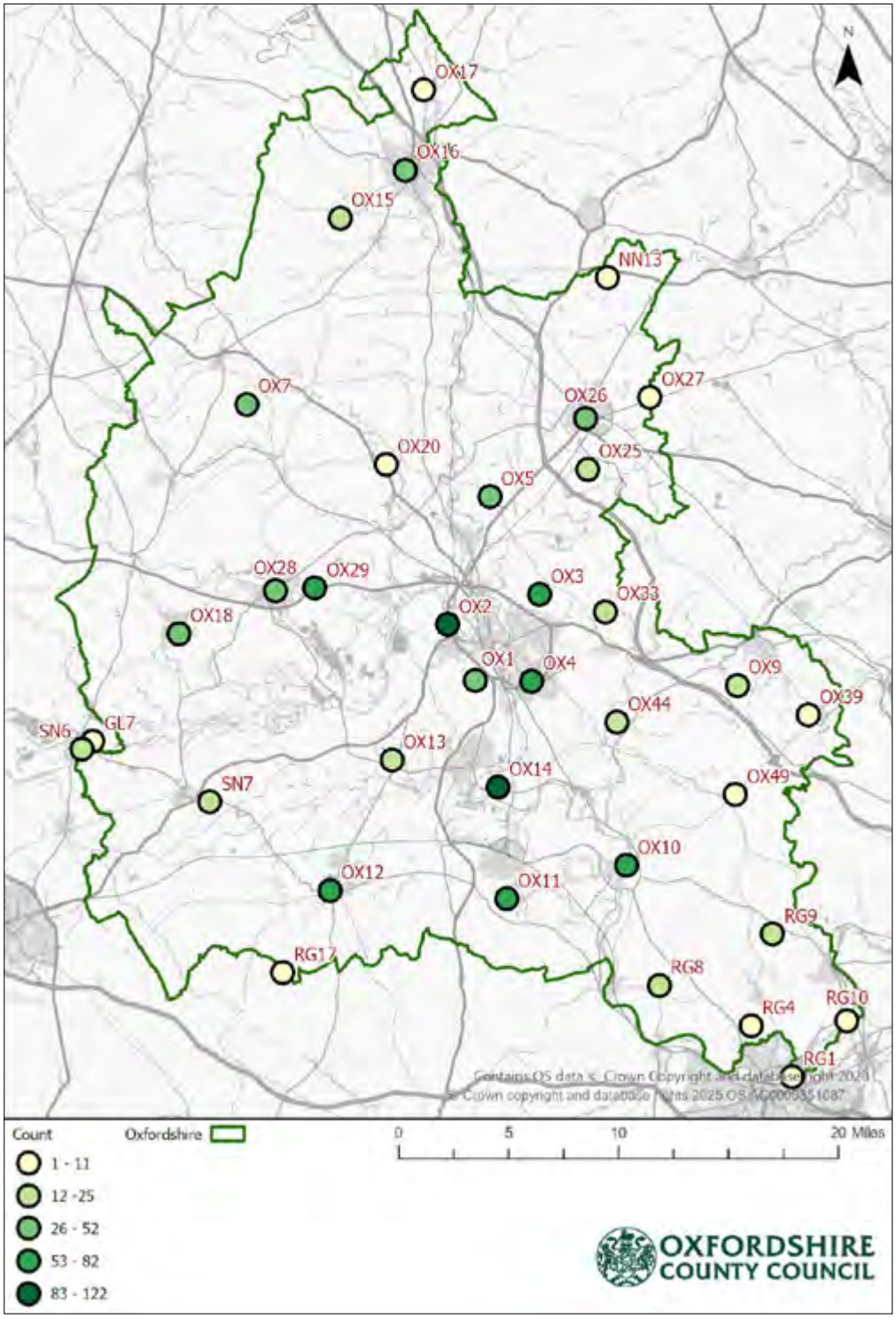


Table 1: Survey respondent profile

	Survey respondents (all)		Survey respondents (Oxfordshire residents only)		Actual % in Oxfordshire's population
Age band					
	(number)	(%)	(number)	(%)	
Under 16	1	0	1	0	18%
16 – 24	9	1	7	1	12%
25 – 34	70	6	66	6	14%
35 – 44	121	10	117	10	13%
45 – 54	178	15	170	15	13%
55 – 64	308	25	295	25	12%
65 – 74	328	27	316	27	9%
75 – 84	184	15	176	15	6%
85 or over	19	2	18	2	3%
Prefer not to say	107		99		
Not answered	19		10		
Sex					
	(number)	(%)	(number)	(%)	
Female	518	42	497	42	51%
Male	711	58	678	58	49%
I use another term	4	0	3		
Prefer not to say	95		89		
Not answered	16		8		
Ethnic group					
	(number)	(%)	(number)	(%)	
Asian or Asian British	15	1	14	1	5%
Black or Black British	4	0	4	0	2%
Chinese	2	0	2	0	1%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	13	1	13	1	3%
White	1120	96	1072	97	87%
Other ethnic group or background	7	1	6	1	2%
Prefer not to say	162		152		
Not answered	21		18		
Long term illness or disability					
	(number)	(%)	(number)	(%)	
Yes - a lot	58	5	57	5	5%
Yes - a little	194	16	184	16	9%
No	991	80	946	80	85%
Prefer not to say	81		77		
Not answered			11		

4. Main findings

Perceived benefits of bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future

4.1 At the start of the survey (Q1) all participants were asked the question:

'*What do you think are the benefits of bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?*'

4.2 Overall, 1,312 people responded to this question, sharing a diverse range of views across 2,075 comments with many people providing feedback covering several topics.

4.3 A thematic analysis of this data has been undertaken, using manually created code frames and person-led coding. As shown in table 2 below, overall, 21 analysis codes were created, with themes received fewer than ten mentions coded as 'other'.

Table 2: Perceived benefits of bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future

Coding theme	Count (n)	% of all comments
More efficient, reduce duplication, streamlined, joined up, focused	421	20
Saving money	383	18
No benefits / general disapproval of one council model (reason not given)	243	12
Clearer accountability and responsibility	179	9
Single point of contact	140	7
Better services, positive impact on service delivery	92	4
Consistency/Equitability across the county. Services / planning / funding	91	4
Council will be too big	42	2
Supports county unity	39	2
Disapproval of one council model - county is too diverse	39	2
Concerns about services and decision-making being more remote from local areas	38	2
Concerns about dominance of Oxford in a one council model	34	2
Transport infrastructure / delivery benefits	29	1
Disapproval of LGR - stay as we are	28	1
Simplified decision making	27	1
Preference for alternative LGR model	25	1
General support for one council model (reason not given)	22	1
Belief it would lead to a reduction in council tax	19	1
Concerns about cost or process of transition	18	1
One council would have increased resources	14	1
Other	152	7

4.4 From the thematic analysis two dominant themes emerged, encompassing half (38 per cent) of all comments made. By far the most frequently cited theme was **efficiency and streamlining of services**, mentioned 421 times. This theme appears to reflect a strong desire from survey respondents for operational efficiency and simplification through local government reorganisation and specifically the single county unitary model. Respondents highlighted the potential for reduced duplication, streamline processes, improved coordination, a more joined-up approach to governance and eliminating duplicated services.

For example, one participant noted:

"Merge duplicated departments to save money. Improved planning and execution with everything being in one house."

Others stated:

"Running 6 Council as now is a shocking waste of money… time and money are wasted on rivalry and arguments."

"It should be more efficient."

"Economies of scale and sharing resources where possible."

"Less duplication of effort, single or at least common admin functions."

4.5 This was closely followed by the theme of **saving money**, referenced in 383 times. Many respondents believed that a single unitary council could lead to financial efficiencies, particularly through reduced administrative overheads and this could allow for a better use of public funds.

One respondent stated:

"Hopefully reduced costs and simplification of services and responsibilities."

Other comments included:

"Cost savings, a better overall view for Oxfordshire, hopefully more joined up thinking."

"Save money potentially by merging."

"Cost saving, less duplication of effort."

"Hopefully cost saving, but I doubt this will be seen at front line services based on previous results!"

4.6 Two secondary themes, which accounted for 15 per cent of responses (179 mentions) also emerged: **clearer accountability and responsibility and single point of contact**. Respondents expressed frustration with the current two-tier system, noting confusion over which council is responsible for what. Respondents felt that a single county unitary model could simplify governance and make it easier for residents to understand who is responsible for services. For instance:

"Greater who-does-what clarity. The way that Oxford has so many different bodies running it is inefficient and confusing."

4.7 **Single point of contact** appeared 140 times in the analysis, reflecting a spontaneous desire among some respondents for a simplified and unified way to access council services. This theme captures the view that a single unitary council could reduce confusion, improve accessibility, and streamline interactions between residents and local government. Respondents also used this code to express frustration with the current multi-tiered system, where responsibilities are split between different councils, making it difficult to know who to contact for specific services. One comment stated:

"*Much simpler to interact with one over-arching system, for things like school applications etc."*

4.8 The third tier of comments focused on **better services** and the potential positive impact on services and consistency and **equitability across the county in terms of service, planning and funding** (mentioned 92 and 91 times respectively). Many of these respondents believed that consolidating services under a single county unitary would improve service delivery, especially in areas like transport, housing, and education, as illustrated by the following quotes:

"I hope it means the council will be able to build better transport infrastructure like train to Witney from Oxford."

"Simpler, more joined up services. Financial efficiency and resilience."

"Improved outcomes for vulnerable residents."

4.9 A sizeable proportion of responses used this question however, to express general negativity towards the proposed single unitary authority model with 243 responses coded under this theme. It was not always clear when reading the comments if the criticism was against unitary authorities in general or the county unitary model. 39 comments were however critical of the county unitary model with express reasons given. These responses often reflected concerns about loss of local representation and effectiveness.

4.10 The following word cloud visualisation highlights the most used words in participants' answer to the question *'What do you think are the benefits of bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?'*. After removing common supporting words (Oxfordshire, service, benefit etc.) and stop words (it, the etc.), it reinforces the key themes of efficiency and cost savings and simplification as shown in the more detailed thematic analysis.

Word cloud visualisation of the benefits of a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future

Potential concerns regarding bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future

4.11 The second question in the survey (Q2) all participants were asked the question:

'What, if anything, concerns you about bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?'

4.12 Overall, 1,310 people responded to this question, providing 1,716 comments on a wide range of themes, with again, many people providing feedback covering several topics. As per Q1, a thematic analysis of this data has been undertaken, using the same manual coding process. This time 20 analysis codes were created, with again, themes that received fewer than ten mentions coded as 'other'. A summary of this coding is shown in table three below.

Table 3: Potential concerns regarding bringing all council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future

Coding theme	Count (n)	% of all comments
Inability to balance needs / wants of diverse areas	262	15
Loss of local knowledge / disconnected from communities / remote	218	13
Too large an area for one council	140	8
Dominance of Oxford in a one council model	133	8
Increased costs / funding / waste	117	7
Negative impact on service quality/delivery	81	5
Negative effects on decision making	77	4
Reduced accountability	75	4
Political makeup of the council	64	4
Concerns about transition process / disruption during	54	3
Reductions in staff numbers / job losses	51	3
Negative impact on planning	43	3
Concern that one council will be more difficult to communicate with	35	2
Increase in council tax	31	2
More bureaucracy	30	2
Dominance of non-city in a one council model	29	2
Preference for alternative model	23	1
One council has too much power	17	1
Other	107	6
None/nothing	128	7

4.13 It is worth noting upfront that a significant number of respondents (128 or seven percent) used this opportunity to proactively share that that they did not have any concerns about the single county unitary proposal or were activity supportive of it as illustrated by this comment:

"No concerns, much more a sigh of relief that this is well overdue."

4.14 Many others raised substantive issues that reflecting potential anxieties about representation, service quality, and local identity. The most dominant concerns were the perceived **inability to balance**

diverse needs mentioned in 262 comments (15 per cent) and the perceived **loss of local knowledge and disconnection from communities** appearing in over 218 comments (13 per cent).

4.15 Respondents highlighted the differences between **Oxford City and its surrounding rural communities**, suggesting that a one-size-fits-all approach would be inappropriate as illustrated by this comment:

"The needs of Oxford city are completely different from those for rural areas and smaller towns."

4.16 Also, some respondents feared that a larger, centralised authority would be **less attuned to the specific needs of smaller towns and rural areas** as illustrated by this comment:

"Local *services are more targeted at local need. I look at other large public sector organisations and there is nothing about them which makes me feel confident."*

4.17 Others thought that **Oxford City would dominate the new council structure** (cited in 133 responses). This concern was often linked to resource allocation and policy priorities.

4.18 Eight per cent of responses (140 comments) were concerned that **a single unitary council for Oxfordshire would be too geographically and administratively vast** to function effectively. Respondents' concerns encompassed sub themes such as such a large entity would struggle to remain responsive, efficient, and locally informed.

"Too big to succeed, I live in Faringdon and think the focus would be on the city of Oxford understandably."

4.19 Concerns about more **bureaucracy, a negative impact on service quality** (81 mentions) and an **increased costs or waste** (117 mentions) were also prevalent, with respondents sceptical about the promised efficiencies.

"Reducing the quality of services provided by my council. Removal of local accountability. Reduction in availability."

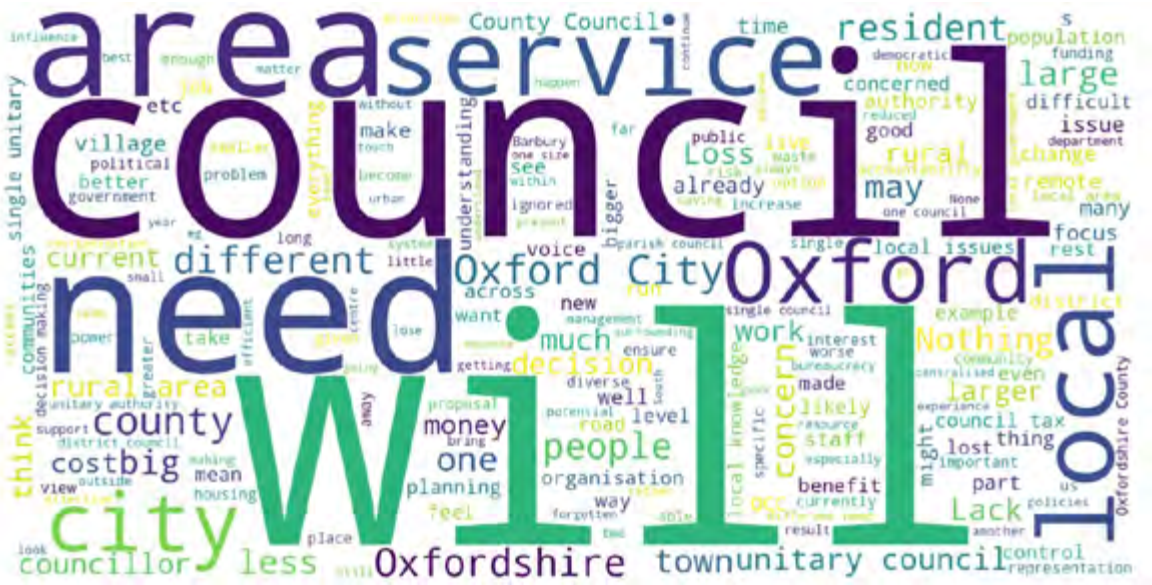
4.20 The theme of **reduced accountability** appeared relatively frequently (75 mentions) and concerns about decision making (77 mentions), with some respondents worried **that fewer councillors would mean less democratic oversight and diminished local voice**.

"More bureaucracy. Increased likelihood of people who know little about an area having a major say in decisions."

4.21 The following word cloud visualisation for Q2 highlights the most used words in participants' answer to the question *'What, if anything, concerns you about bringing all your council services together under a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future?*

4.22 Overall, the following words: "Oxford," "local," "services," "council," "concerns," "rural," "representation," and "needs" stand out, as do terms such as "accountability," "democracy," "planning," "funding," and "bureaucracy". Overall, this visualisation supports the more detailed thematic analysis and appears to show through summarising respondents concerns, a strong desire for any future restructuring of local government in Oxfordshire to be typified by strong localised governance, balanced representation, and transparent decision-making.

Word cloud visualisation of potential concerns associated with a single unitary council for Oxfordshire in the future



The relative importance of different attributes in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate

4.23 Through two quantative questions, the survey explored the relative importance of various attributes for any future unitary councils in Oxfordshire. The first of these questions (Q3) focused on operational attributes for any future unitary authority in the county and respondents were asked to give each of the six attributes listed (easy access for residents, strong financial resilience, clear and accountable decision-making, partnering with town and parish councils, being highly connected and able to drive innovation, and the ability to attract investment and deliver economic growth) a score from 1-10 where 1= not important at all and 10 = extremely important.

4.24 The following tables and charts show the average scores awarded by respondents (mean, mode and median) to each attribute and the distribution of respondents' scores across each of the six attributes. This data provides a comprehensive overview of how respondents rate the relative importance of these six key attributes for future unitary councils in Oxfordshire.

4.25 "**Clear and accountable decision-making**" stands out as the most important, with the highest mean score of 8.69 and the highest number of top ratings (10) from 768 respondents. This indicates that respondents place a significant emphasis on transparency and responsibility in decision-making processes for future councils.

4.26 Following closely is "**strong financial resilience**," which has a mean score of 8.37 and received 639 top ratings. This suggests that financial stability and the ability to manage resources effectively are also seen as crucial for the success of future councils.

4.27 "**Partnering with town and parish councils**" is another important attribute, with a mean score of 8.01 and 605 top ratings. This highlights the value respondents place on collaboration and bringing decision-making closer to local communities.

4.28 On the other hand, the attribute "**highly connected and able to drive innovation**" received the lowest mean score of 7.10 and the fewest top ratings (380). This indicates that while innovation and connectivity in the county are important, they are not seen as critical as the other attributes.

Chart 1: The average 'mean' scores for each 'operational' attribute tested

Question 3: On a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are each of the following in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate

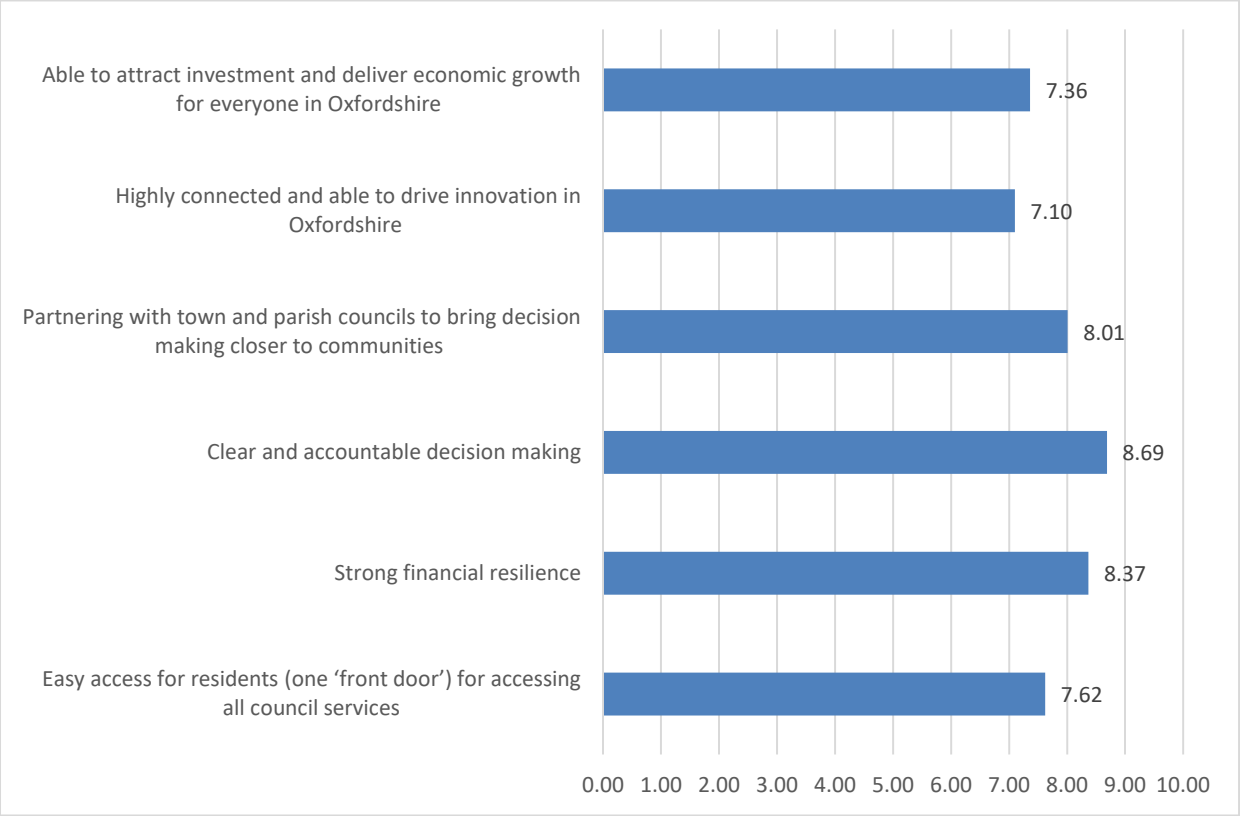


Table 4: The average scores for each 'operational' attribute tested (mean, mode and median)

Question 3: On a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are each of the following in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate

	Easy access for residents (one 'front door') for accessing all council services	Strong financial resilience	Clear and accountable decision making	Partnering with town and parish councils to bring decision making closer to communities	Highly connected and able to drive innovation in Oxfordshire	Able to attract investment and deliver economic growth for everyone in Oxfordshire
Mean - the average of a set of numbers. Add up all the values and divide by the number of values.	7.62	8.37	8.69	8.01	7.10	7.36
Mode - the value that appears most frequently in a set of numbers.	10	10	10	10	10	10
Median -the middle value in a set of numbers when they are arranged in order. If there is an even number of values, it is the average of the two middle numbers.	9	9	10	9	8	8

Chart 2: Distribution of responses for each attribute tested

Question 3: On a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are each of the following in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate (all attributes tested)

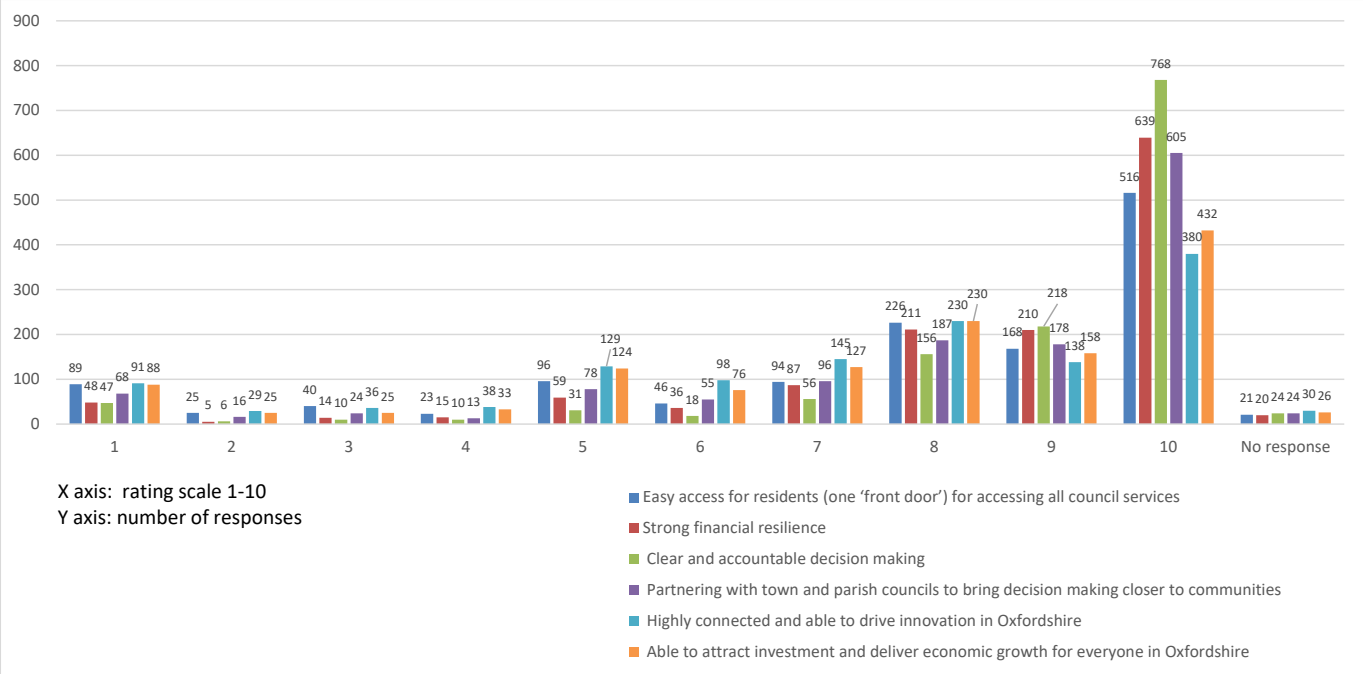


Table 5: Distribution of responses for each attribute tested

Question 3: On a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are each of the following in thinking about how any future unitary council(s) in Oxfordshire should operate (all attributes tested)

Rating scale 1-10	Easy access for residents (one 'front door') for accessing all council services	Strong financial resilience	Clear and accountable decision making	Partnering with town and parish councils to bring decision making closer to communities	Highly connected and able to drive innovation in Oxfordshire	Able to attract investment and deliver economic growth for everyone in Oxfordshire
1	89	48	47	68	91	88
2	25	5	6	16	29	25
3	40	14	10	24	36	25
4	23	15	10	13	38	33
5	96	59	31	78	129	124
6	46	36	18	55	98	76
7	94	87	56	96	145	127
8	226	211	156	187	230	230
9	168	210	218	178	138	158
10	516	639	768	605	380	432
No response	21	20	24	24	30	26
Base:	**1344**	**1344**	**1344**	**1344**	**1344**	**1344**

The relative importance of different attributes of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire

Question 4: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?

4.29 The second of the two quantative questions (Q4) focused on local government reorganisation and respondents were asked to give each of the three attributes listed (generating savings from streamlining services, reducing duplication and running costs, and minimising any disruption in services caused by separating them) a score from 1-10 where 1 = not important at all and 10 = extremely important.

4.30 Overall, "**minimising any disruption in services caused by separating them**" emerges as the most important attribute for respondents. It received the highest mean score of 7.67, indicating that respondents place a significant emphasis on ensuring that services remain uninterrupted during the reorganisation process. Additionally, it received the highest number of top ratings (10) from 535 respondents, further highlighting its critical importance.

4.31 Following closely is "**reducing duplication and running costs**" which has a mean score of 7.58 and received 496 top ratings. As seen in the thematic analysis of spontaneous open comment, this scoring once again suggests that respondents value the efficiency and cost-effectiveness that can be achieved by eliminating redundant processes and resources.

4.32 Finally, "**generating savings from streamlining services**" whilst still important received a slightly lower mean score of 7.36 and 440 top ratings.

4.33 The following tables and charts show the average scores awarded by respondents (mean, mode and median) to each attribute and the distribution of respondents' scores across each of the three attributes. Again, this data provides a comprehensive overview of how respondents rate the relative importance of these three key attributes tested.

Chart 3: The average 'mean' scores for each 'operational' attribute tested

Question 4: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?

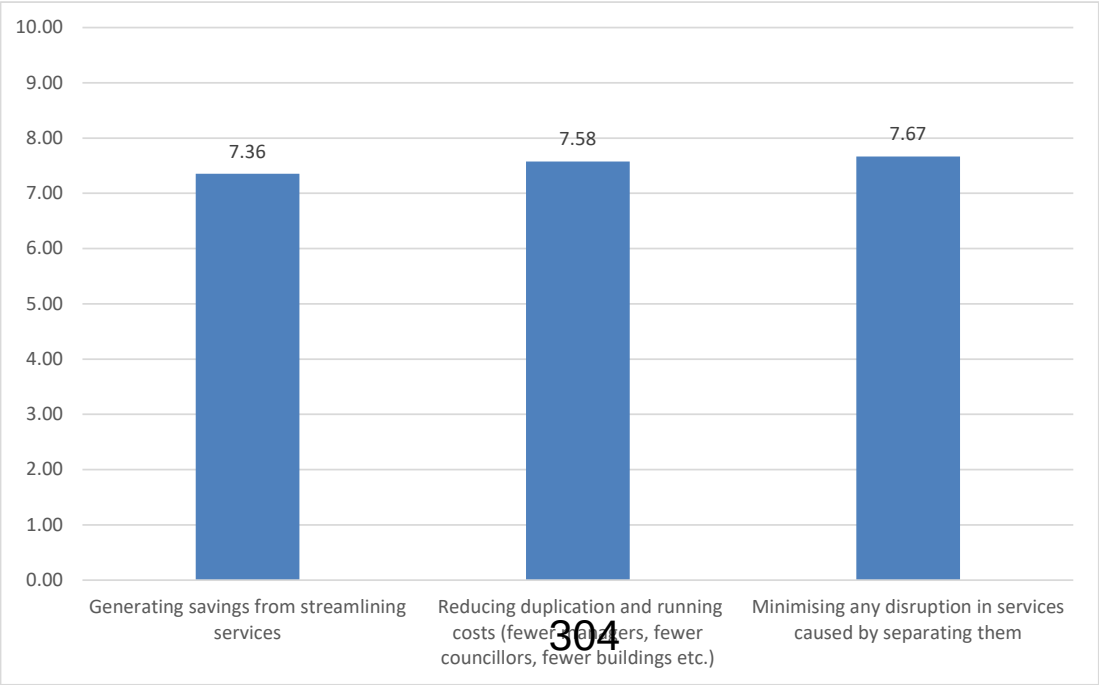


Table 6: The average scores for each 'operational' attribute tested (mean, mode and median)

Question 4: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?

	Generating savings from streamlining services	Reducing duplication and running costs (fewer managers, fewer councillors, fewer buildings etc.)	Minimising any disruption in services caused by separating them
Mean - the average of a set of numbers. Add up all the values and divide by the number of values.	7.36	7.58	7.67
Mode - the value that appears most frequently in a set of numbers.	10	10	10
Median -the middle value in a set of numbers when they are arranged in order. If there is an even number of values, it is the average of the two middle numbers.	8	9	9

Chart 2: Distribution of responses for each attribute tested

Question 4: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?

Chart base: 1344

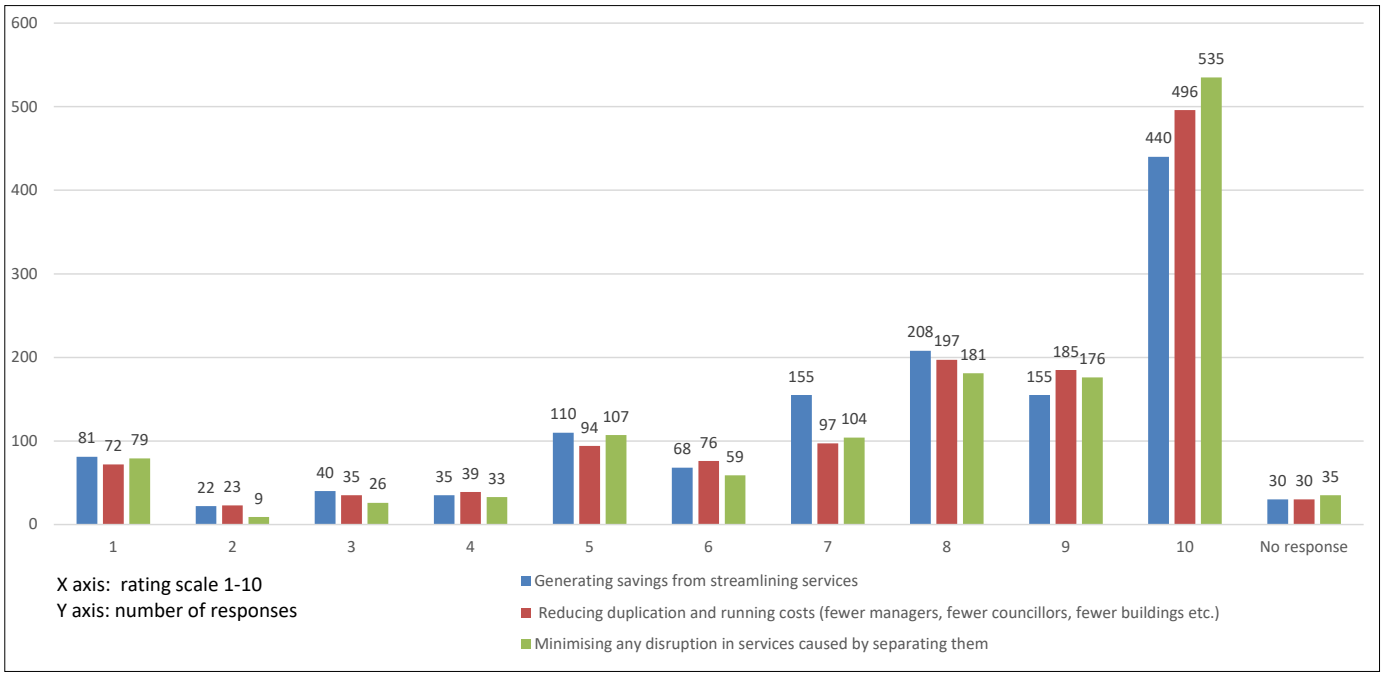


Table 7: Distribution of responses for each attribute tested

Question 4: And on a scale from 1=Not important at all to 10=Extremely important, how important are the following aspects of local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire to you?

Rating scale 1-10	Generating savings from streamlining services	Reducing duplication and running costs (fewer managers, fewer councillors, fewer buildings etc.)	Minimising any disruption in services caused by separating them
1	81	72	79
2	22	23	9
3	40	35	26
4	35	39	33
5	110	94	107
6	68	76	59
7	155	97	104
8	208	197	181
9	155	185	176
10	440	496	535
No response	30	30	35
Total	**1344**	**1344**	**1344**

How can local government in Oxfordshire can work better for you and your community in the future

4.34 The final, substantive question in the survey (Q5) was:

'Is there anything else you would like to say about how local government in Oxfordshire can work better for you and your community in the future?'

4.35 Overall, 1,012 people responded to this question, providing 1,343 comments on a wide range of themes with again many people providing feedback covering several topics. As per the other open questions, a thematic analysis of this data has been undertaken, using the same manual coding process. This time 28 analysis codes were created, with again themes that received fewer than ten mentions coded as 'other'.

4.36 Comments were varied and disparate, with a large number falling into the "other" category as one-off topics or mentioned infrequently. They ranged from concerns about council staffing, service quality, and general dissatisfaction with local government. A summary of the thematic coding is shown in table four below.

Table 6: Comments about how local government in Oxfordshire can work better for people and communities in the future

Theme	Count	% of mentions
Preference for alternative LGR model	106	8
Importance of resident engagement / listening to residents	91	7
Travel, transport schemes and infrastructure	83	6
Approval of one council for Oxfordshire model	81	6
Criticism of the consultation / doubt responses will have an impact	80	6
Disapproval of LGR in general	68	5
Importance of local representation / knowledge / connection	64	5
Improve/increase services	56	4
Negative view of the county council	53	4
Need for council to be easily accessible / contactable to residents	50	4
Inability/need to balance needs / wants of diverse areas	48	4
Improve efficiency / savings / reduce waste	40	3
Importance of clear responsibilities / accountability / transparency	38	3
Highways / roads maintenance, potholes	34	3
Concerns about the dominance of Oxford	28	2
Comment on political party or party politics	27	2
One council would be too big	24	2
Increase power / influence / resources of town and parish councils	19	1
Comment on delivery of LGR / transition	16	1
Changes to council tax	14	1
Support for environmental action	13	1
More information needed	12	1
Comment on mayoral authority / combined authority	12	1
More housing / affordable housing	12	1
Approval of LGR in general	11	1
Disapproval of one council for Oxfordshire model in general	11	1
Keep Oxfordshire and other counties separate	10	1
Drive growth and innovation	5	0
No comments / None	52	4
Other	185	14

4.37 This question also drew out comments providing notable support for alternative local government reorganisation proposals for the Oxfordshire areas (106 mentions) to improve local government in the future. These comments were often rooted in a desire to preserve local identity.

4.38 The importance of resident engagement and listening to residents (91 mentions) by local authorities now and into the future, was frequently emphasised, underscoring the need for genuine consultation, citizens' involvement and transparent decision-making regarding local government reorganisation.

"Listen to residents and local businesses. Services should be for the benefit of all, not just the few."

"Cons*ultations need to be meaningful. We have a lot of them at present but often the views expressed seem to be ignored."*

4.39 Some respondents took the opportunity to use this survey to express frustration and concern about current service and policy matters and specifically transport and infrastructure issues in the county had a sizeable number of mentions (83). People used this survey as an opportunity feedback on levels of congestion, low traffic neighbourhoods in Oxford and rural connectivity. This indicates the importance of transport policy as priority in local government reorganisation.

4.40 Lastly, some people used this question to share their support for the council's proposal for a single unitary council for Oxfordshire (81 mentions). With respondents citing efficiency and strategic coherence as key benefits, linking this support to perceived improvements in service delivery and cost savings.

"A single Oxfordshire unitary council would be the most effective way to deliver fair and joined-up local government."

"One council would work much better and cause a lot less confusion."

Resident perceptions of LGR

Sub-Report

PREPARED FOR OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

RACHEL MCGRAIL/
CLAIRE TYRRELL-WILLIAMS

J1096/JULY 2025

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Conclusions & Recommendations Page 12

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Background

Background

Following the local elections in May 2025, Oxfordshire County Council is starting to shape its overarching vision and strategic priorities for the period 2025 – 2029. Parallel to this, the council is also developing its preferred proposal for local government reorganisation in the county, which must be submitted to government by late November.

To support this work, Oxfordshire County Council commissioned REMind Research, an independent research agency, to carry out a series of focus groups with Oxfordshire residents.

The primary objectives for the sessions were to:

- explore current behaviours and attitudes towards local government and services among residents from across the county and representing different living situations/ life stages
- identify any gaps in understanding, provision or future requirements
- examine reactions to draft strategic vision, statements and potential actions
- deliberate benefits and concerns regarding future structure

This sub-report provides a comprehensive and impartial account of resident opinions on the aspects of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) discussed specifically within the sessions. As a qualitative study, some of the opinions and inferences may not be factually correct, however, they are the perceptions of those participating.

NB. The full report: Resident perceptions of Strategic Plan and LGR is available under separate cover

Approach

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METHOD

- 2-hour focus group sessions with Oxfordshire residents
- Conducted online via Zoom
- Independently recruited by Simply Field
- Independently designed, moderated and analysed by REMind Research
- Fieldwork conducted between 1 July and 15 July 2025
- 9 groups completed; 63 participants participated
- Participants welcomed the opportunity to participate and appreciated the opportunity to be part of the study and share their views

PROFILE

Group composition (9 focus groups overall)	Overall breakdown of participants
1. Younger adults, drawn from urban geographies	• 27 x men • 36 x women
2. Younger adults, drawn from rural geographies	• 50 x White • 13 x BAME
3. Younger adults, drawn from the 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England	• 22 x <30 years old • 20 x 30-59 years old • 21 x 60+ years old
4. Families, drawn from urban geographies	• 21 x children in household • 42 x no children in household
5. Families, drawn from rural geographies	• 9 x Cherwell • 27 x Oxford City[1] • 6 x West Oxfordshire • 13 x South Oxfordshire • 8 x Vale of White Horse
6. Families, drawn from the 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England	
7. Empty nesters/older adults, drawn from urban geographies	
8. Empty nesters/older adults, drawn from rural geographies	
9. Empty nesters/older adults, drawn from the 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England	

1. A greater number of Oxford City Council residents were included not because of oversampling, but because three sessions included residents from wards including areas ranked within the 20% most deprived nationally—six out of ten of these wards fall within the Oxford City Council boundary

Local Government reorganisation

Awareness of local government reorganisation

Minimal awareness of future local government reorganisation (except among older residents)

Unitary local authority status makes sense

- Most intuitively feel a county-wide unitary authority is a logical step
- Older people are more wary about change generally and the accountability within any unitary council

Significant benefits from having a unitary authority

- Residents can identify benefits and concerns with the proposition but for most, the benefits (if achieved) outweigh potential issues (if dealt with)

Retention of local links is important

- Understanding that town/parish councils and elected local councillors would still exist allay some fears of lack of understanding of local areas

Ease and reassurance are integral for resident buy-in

- Important for residents to have one access point for all services as well as accountable decision making and minimal disruption to existing services in transition

> "If it was one council then, obviously, you're not duplicating roles within there, and it should streamline the actual process of getting tasks achieved."
> Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

> "Is it going to save money? You've got people saying we need this, and we need that, then some saying we can't afford this. Who's going to decide all that."
> Female, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

> "In order for it to work, I think not only do people need to be approving of it and want that to be the system that we follow, there would have to be justifications and kind of explanations around the decisions, and things like that."
> Female, Younger, Rural area

> "If the concerns are addressed properly, you know, then obviously, we'll reap the benefits. But the concerns have to be addressed properly, and, you know, sorted out before you can move forward."
> Female, Older, Urban area

> "If there's like a little cottage office for the Council, then that would be handy. It would make it a little bit handier if there was little satellite offices out and about."
> Male, Older, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

> "Local knowledge. I suppose if Oxfordshire is obviously a big place and you have got the rural elements of it, it's the local knowledge that you get from the parishes that would be lost."
> Female, Older, Rural area

> "Actually seeing the results and having accountability, whether that's through 1 central place or sort of three individual councils, you know, doesn't really matter about the structure of that being done. It's the how and the deliverables and what you see at the end of it."
> Female, Family, Urban area

> "I think accountable decision making is like promising, so that people have trust in them."
> Female, Younger, Rural area

Benefits of a single unitary authority for Oxfordshire

In exploring possible benefits of having one unitary authority for the county, residents were asked to map what they view as core benefits

- Residents are particularly mindful that streamlining services and removing duplication of departments/buildings should result in greater cost efficiencies
  - ultimately creating more budget to fund key services

- Also identified as key benefits are:
  - the potential for better coordination of services such as public transport, roadworks, housing developments to minimise disruption
  - having one point of access so it is easy for residents to know where to go for support and resulting in better communications
  - greater consistency and fairness of policies and services across the county

- Improvements in decision making and time saving in agreeing policy is considered a key potential advantage

"I'd say, speed of things getting done potentially in decisions because less sign off or red tape stopping people and going through different things."

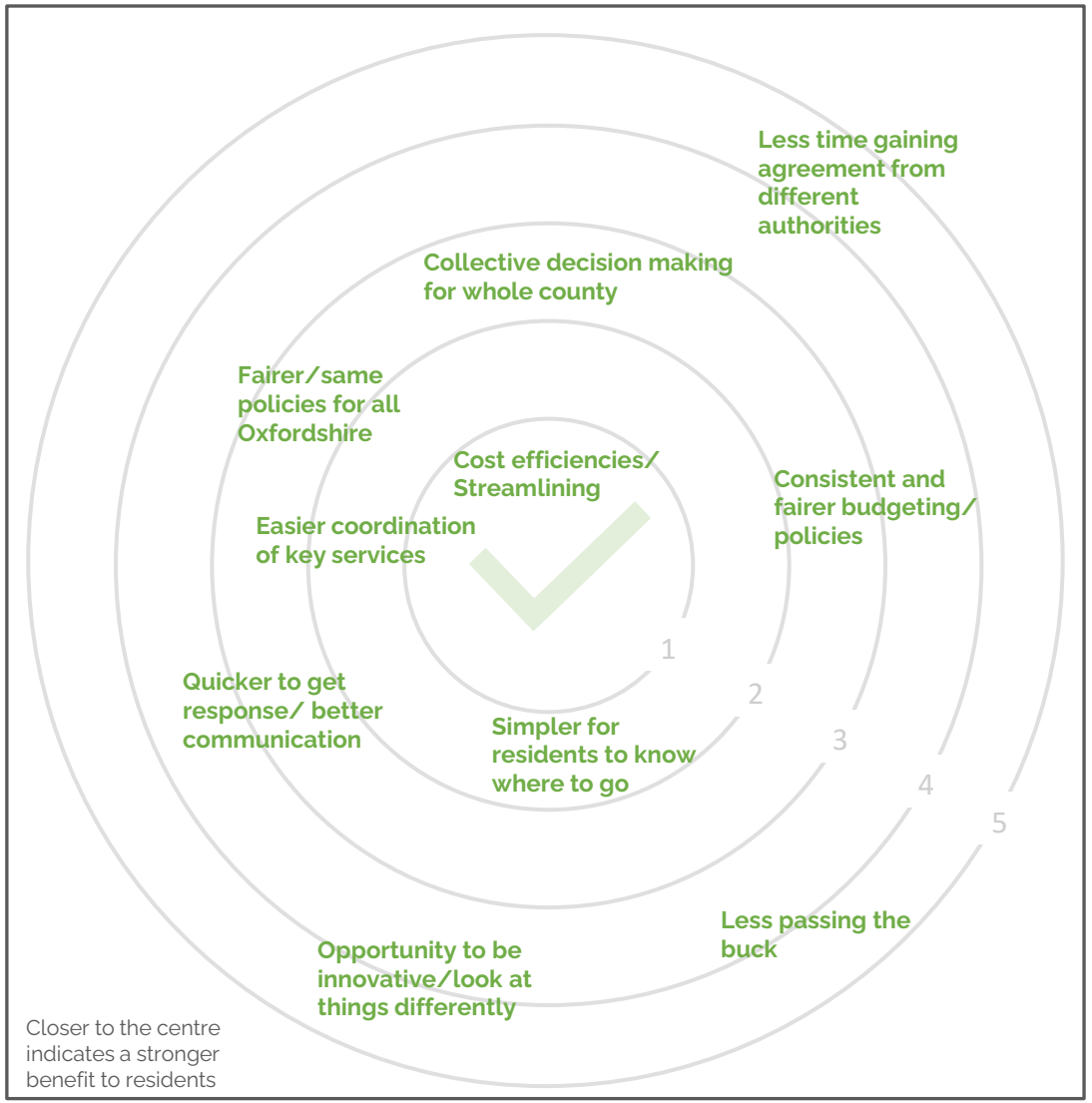
Male, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

"This is like what I was saying earlier. You know that obviously you've got duplication of departments and services, they've got to go through those various departments to negotiate some kind of deal effectively to find a solution. So, if you put it all into under one roof, it should improve efficiency."

Male, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

"It provides everyone with a fairer opportunity to access services. I think that's pretty important."

Female, Family, Rural area



Benefits are plotted based on two factors: the frequency with which they were mentioned across the sessions, and the strength of the benefit as perceived and expressed by residents

Concerns about a single unitary authority for Oxfordshire

Residents also deliberated any concerns they may have around one unitary authority for the county

- The biggest concern for residents is that there will be a loss of understanding about their particular local area and a reduction in local face-to-face contact points for residents

- Also identified as key concerns are:
  - whether there will be comparatively fewer staff to deal with services than currently, ultimately leading to greater backlogs and slower decision making
  - how distribution of funds and services will be balanced across the whole county with differing political tendencies
  - ensuring services are not disrupted through the transition to a new administration (especially if currently well performing)
  - the cost of transitioning people and processes to a single unitary authority and the potential for job losses/ redundancies

"The focus will no longer be on my area only. So, yeah, I'll be worried that my issue would be neglected."

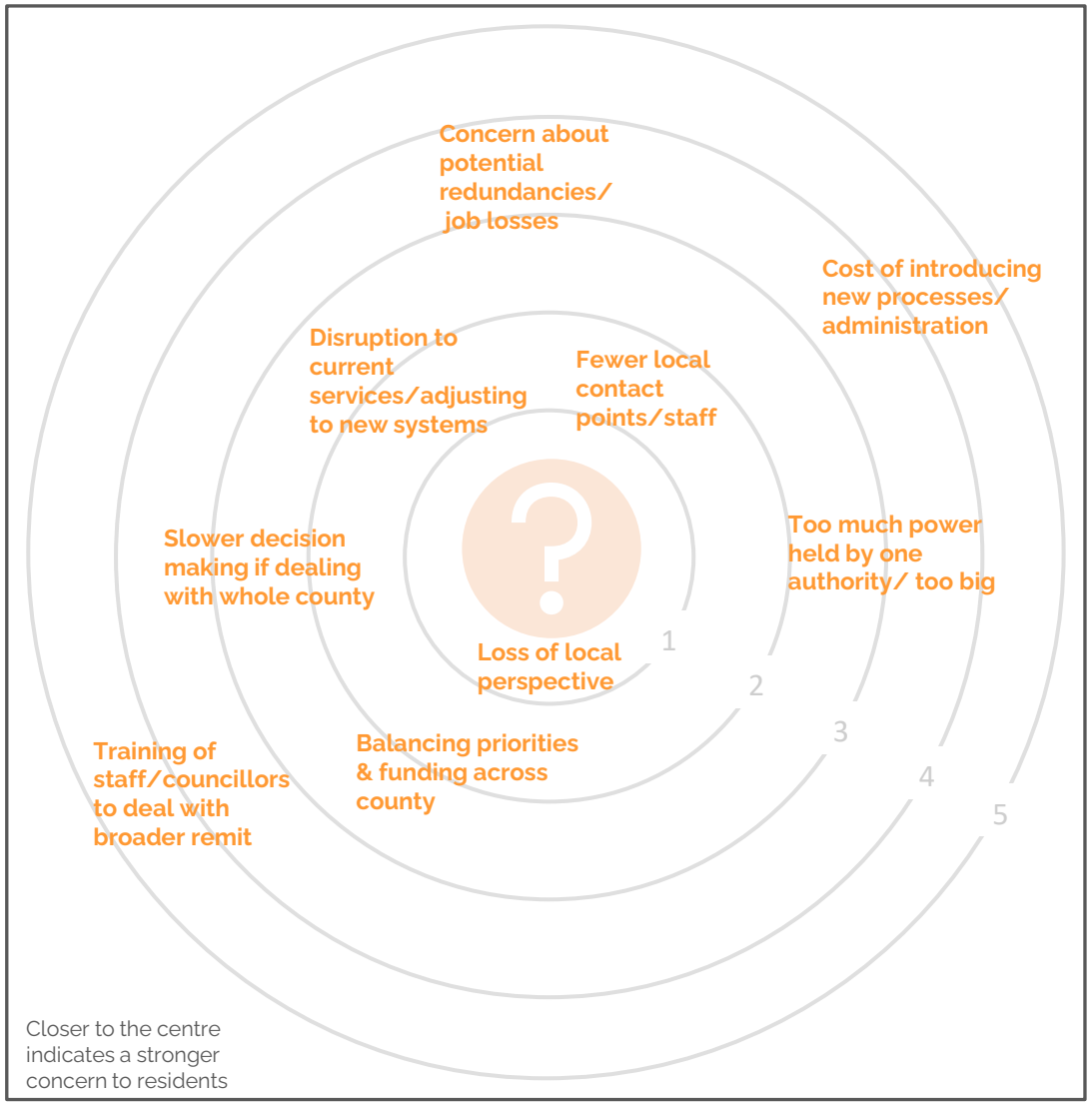
Male, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

"That it would cost a huge amount of money to do. Setting up new IT stuff, you've got to consider that there's quite a few councils at the moment embedded in the halls. They've got to disentangle that. They've got to amalgamate themselves and all work under the same umbrella, the same policies and everything else. All the computer systems have got to link up."

Male, Family, Rural area

"If it's gonna actually work. like they're minimising, but they're not gonna minimise too much."

Female, Family, Ward with areas of higher deprivation



Concerns are plotted based on two factors: the frequency with which they were mentioned across the sessions, and the strength of the concern as perceived and expressed by residents

Overcoming concerns

The majority of residents (particularly those who are younger or have families) believe that benefits of one unitary authority will offset their concerns if the local authority is careful to address them

Expected outcomes to address concerns

Concerns should be recognised and dealt with transparently. Residents make suggestions including:

- Demonstrating awareness and understanding of these concerns by proactively outlining how they will be combated e.g.
  - how one unitary authority will work with town and parish councils
  - how it intends to deal with differences in political agendas across the county
  - how it intends to distribute funds/prioritise needs of city vs rest of county and vice versa
  - how departments will be staffed and abilities to deal with services for the whole county

- Introducing more mini or mobile local contact points so each area sees a council presence over certain days a month if permanent district offices no longer in use

- Having more communication and engagement with residents. This was expressed across all ages and while traditional media/methods of contact was acknowledged by families and older people, those who are younger would like to be kept updated via social media (preferably TikTok and Instagram)

In residents' own words

"Because I think it would save billions, merging into one and then obviously that's beneficial in the long run."
Female, Older, Rural area

"So one council, you would have one HR etc. and it would hopefully make it more efficient."
Male, Older, Urban area

"If we're talking about it being fairer if there's one council creating collective decisions across the whole county that would provide greater consistency which would be a benefit. I suppose the opposite to that is that by only having one council is there potential to lose touch with local issues."
Male, Family, Urban area

"Concerns are addressed properly you know then obviously we'll reap the benefits but the concerns have to be addressed properly and you know sorted out before you can move forward really female."
Female, Older, Urban area

"I mean, if they're going to cut out the red tape in having less disparity with decisions that are made in each of the different districts then that makes sense."
Male, Younger, Rural area

"If you've got one council then there's not going to be the different opinions coming right, left and centre of what's more important and they can just focus on what they think needs focusing on."
Female, Younger, Rural area

"Local knowledge I suppose. If Oxfordshire is obviously a big place and you have the rural elements of it. It's the local knowledge that you get from the parishes that would be lost."
Female, Older, Rural area

"I feel like if they're changing something, they can't change something and make it worse. They have to change it for the better, which if they are going to change anything which is working and running well, there shouldn't be any disruption."
Female, Younger, Rural area

"It's that clear and accountable in their decision making that brings in everything."
Male, Younger, Ward with areas of higher deprivation

Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions & Recommendations

Residents want to be engaged with the county council's vision and goals. They value living in Oxfordshire but seek clear and detailed plans for future direction to secure their support and trust.

CONCLUSIONS

While local government reorganisation isn't top of mind, on balance, they generally favour a single unitary authority for the county.

- Most residents are unaware of local government restructuring, with the exception of older age groups
- Confusion over how services are divided across local government tiers leads to spontaneous queries on why the current structure is in place and advocacy for a one county authority for many
- On balance, benefits of having one countywide unitary authority outweigh concerns as long as potential issues are addressed adequately
  - Main benefits are seen to be cost saving and greater efficiency, wider and more coherent and fair policies for the whole county and having one access point for residents for all key services
  - The prevailing concerns are a loss of perspective on specific needs of local areas and service disruption during transition
- Older residents are more likely to be sceptical of the benefits of switching to a unitary system, regardless of the final form it may take

RECOMMENDATIONS

Be proactive in addressing concerns of LGR and benefits of one unitary authority for Oxfordshire

- Focus on how one authority can lead to cost saving and greater efficiency and more consistent and fair policies across the county
- Purposefully outline awareness of concerns and how these will be mitigated e.g.
  - Plans for smooth transition
  - How clear and accountable decision making will be achieved
  - Continuing presence of local councillors to ensure representation of local views
  - What engagement with town/parish councils looks like
  - How current county-wide services (education, libraries etc.) are already working consistently and fairly for all areas
  - How the council will utilise resident ideas and feedback

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Part 4:

One Council, Your Oxfordshire

Sounding Board Report Local government reorganisation

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Local Government Reorganisation

Executive Summary

Between 27 June and 17 July 2025, Oxfordshire County Council conducted four in-person sounding board sessions with a total of 81 secondary school-aged students from four schools across the county. These sessions formed part of a broader programme of engagement to inform the development of the Council's new strategic plan and proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR).

The workshops were structured into two parts. The first provided knowledge about local government structures and services, including a Q&A with the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Council, while the second part focused on gathering feedback on the Council's strategic priorities and local government reorganisation (LGR).

Students identified potential benefits such as improved efficiency, simplified access to services, and stronger community cohesion when considering local government reorganisation. However, concerns were raised about the loss of local representation, slower decision-making, and unequal resource distribution.

Evaluation feedback was largely positive, with most participants rating the sessions highly and expressing appreciation for the opportunity to contribute meaningfully. Suggestions for improvement included more interactive elements, greater inclusivity, and additional information on local governance. Overall, the sounding boards successfully captured the voices of younger residents, offering valuable insights into their priorities and concerns for Oxfordshire's future.

1. Introduction

Context

Between Friday 27 June and Thursday 17 July 2025 Oxfordshire County Council held four in-person sounding boards for secondary school aged children. The sounding boards were part of a multi-strand package of engagement to inform the development of the council's new strategic plan and proposal for local government reorganisation.

Attendees

A total of four schools, across four Oxfordshire districts, signed up to the event (see Appendix 2). The 4 events brought together 81 young people across the four days, aged between 11 to 17.

Participants included:

- 40 males, 40 females and one who preferred not to say
- 75 people under 16, 5 aged between 16-24 and 1 who preferred not to share their age
- 10 self-identified young carers
- 12 individuals who were impacted by a disability
- a mix of ethnicities with 12, British Asian/ Asian, 8, Black British/Black, 5 Mixed ethnic, 45 white and 7 Other. There were 3 who preferred not to say and 1 who did not complete the monitoring form.

Plan for the day

Please see Appendix 1 for the event agenda.

The session was 2 hours in total. The first hour consisted of a presentation about how Oxfordshire is split up into the different tiers of councils and where it sits with national government. This was followed with an activity to enable the young people to understand what services it provided and a short Q&A with the Chair or Deputy Chair of the Council. After establishing a baseline understanding of local government, the second hour of the session was designed to gather feedback from young people on LGR and the council's emerging strategic priorities.

2. Methodology

Schools were invited to take part in an engagement opportunity; wherein county council staff would come to their school to deliver a 2-hour sounding board workshop. The session was designed to meet school curriculum needs regarding citizenship conversations and specifically how the council and local politics work; as well as meeting the council's goal to engage young people with local government reorganisation and with the development of the council's strategic plan. With a captive audience from schools, there was no requirement to pay or incentivise an audience to attend an event outside of school hours.

Ideally, we wanted three secondary schools based in different types of geographies to participate: rural, market town, and city. We approached several schools across the county to see which were able to accommodate our activities at the end of the school year. The four schools

- Greyfriars (Oxford)
- Henry Box School (Witney)
- Lord Williamson (Thame)
- Faringdon Community College (Faringdon)

which were available, arranged a group of students that were able to meet us. Each of the schools had a different reason for the make up of their group. All the sessions were delivered in the morning for two hours.

The sounding boards were run by three members of the Engagement and Consultation Team, with one facilitator and two supporters. To help bring the citizenship activity alive, we asked the current Chairperson of the Council to attend so they could share information about their role and take questions from the students. Where the Chair wasn't available, the Deputy Chairperson and former Chairpersons attended where possible.

3. Findings from insight activities

The two-hour session was split into two parts, the first being information about how the different councils work, so that they could answer the questions about LGR as well as OCC strategic priorities.

After the talks about citizenship and democracy, table discussions were self-driven by the student's discussing questions posed about the LGR and the strategic priorities.

The young people were asked to work in small groups and to write down their answers to the questions posed to them throughout the session; so that their feedback could be collated and reported. The report provides insight form the LGR discussions only.

Context

To help the students understand local government reorganisation we explained what the national government has asked the councils to do. We shared, and explained simply, the three proposals that have been put out by Oxfordshire's counicls for discussion. To help them understand the different areas we showed the geographical maps of the county and helped them to identify where they lived and the extent of Oxfordshire and the surrounding areas which were relevant. We reminded them of the different types of services that each council currently delivers and that those same services would be delivered by one council. We then went on to explain the council's preferred One Oxfordshire Council proposal, briefly explaining why we think its good to be Oxfordshire together.

Following this input we asked two questions.

- What do you think are the **benefits** of bringing all your council services together under a one Oxfordshire Council in the future?
- What **concerns** you about bringing all your council services together under one Oxfordshire Council in the future?

Below is their collective response.

Benefits

Students shared their thoughts on having a One Oxfordshire Council. Significantly, most of the comments saw it as a way to increase efficiency, improve communication, and provide better services across the whole county. They thought it promised easier access for residents, stronger voices and community links, and more effective use of resources.

- **Increased efficiency and budget management:** A single council would reduce confusion, consolidate budgets, and cut administrative expenses, allowing for better allocation of funds and quicker decision-making.

  "Services can cross over unlike before, more people will benefit."

- **Improved access and communication:** Residents from right across the whole of Oxfordshire would know who to contact and would benefit from having one point of contact for services, simplifying interactions with authorities and enhancing public engagement and communication.

"Less confusing as you only have one place to go if you have complaints or problems, it's also easier to know which party controls your area."

- **Stronger community and equality:** Uniting different towns under one Oxfordshire council encourages a wider sense of community, promotes equality in service quality, and encourages collaborative decision-making across the county.

  "We can all be in unison across Oxfordshire."

- **Enhanced opportunities and development:** The combined council could generate more ideas, support local businesses, improve public amenities, and address larger problems more effectively, benefiting a wider population.

  "Less money wasted as you can concentrate all the money in one place and spend well and it will maybe have more impact."

Concerns

There was widespread concern from the students about merging multiple councils into a single large council. The main issues revolved around the potential loss of local focus, inefficiency, financial concerns and unequal representation of smaller towns compared to larger ones.

- **Loss of local focus and representation:** Residents worry that a single large council would struggle to address specific local issues effectively, with smaller areas receiving less attention and voices being unheard. This could weaken the sense of community and reduce the council's ability to manage diverse local needs. Concentrating power in the city raised worries of reduced responsibility for the villages, and the possibility that problems in council meetings could have widespread negative effects across the county.

  "Harder decision making because it's so broad/big."

- **Increased complexity and slower decision-making**: Combining councils was seen as creating a broad organisation that would face difficulties in decision-making, leading to slower responses and potential conflicts among members due to differing priorities, becoming frustration for residents.

  "More conflict and disagreements."

- **Economic and employment concerns**: There were fears that merging councils could lead to job losses, reduced opportunities, and higher costs, with villages and towns potentially facing increased taxes but receiving less services, funding and maintenance.

  "More taxes will be asked because the bigger places need more."

Appendix 5

University of Oxford Medical Humanities, Healthy communities programme evaluation report (2025)

Healthy Communities:

University of Oxford Medical Humanities Phase One Evaluation of CHDO and WT Programmes

Erica Charters, Yuxin Peng, Urvi Khaitan, Theeba Krishnamoorthy, Julia Gustavsson

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Executive Summary

Community Health Development Officers (CHDO) and Well Together (WT) are two community health programmes aiming to reduce health inequalities in the ten Oxfordshire wards identified as priority wards. These are Abingdon Caldecott, Banbury Cross and Neithrop, Banbury Grimsbury and Hightown, Banbury Ruscote, Barton & Sandhills, Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Northfield Brook, Osney & St Thomas, and Rose Hill & Iffley. Health inequalities are differences in health outcomes and access to healthcare. These can include differences in rates of illness, average life expectancy, or the availability of resources such as medical care, healthy and affordable food, or green space.

The CHDO and WT community health programmes draw on Community Insight Profiles, detailed overviews of quantitative and qualitative evidence about which local health and wellbeing assets residents identify as important. They also record community views on what residents appreciate about their ward and which community issues they would like to see addressed, including challenges to health and wellbeing.

Methodology

Our phase one evaluation uses the criteria and issues raised in the Profiles to assess the CHDO and WT programmes. It uses empirical research to analyse the ways in which these programmes have been implemented, and how the programmes engaged with community capacity for health and wellbeing, from January to December 2024. Our evaluation applied methods from medical history, community history, economics, medical anthropology, and public health to understand the social and cultural contexts of community health. Our research team analysed the long-term health and social context of the ten wards; the funding activities of the two programmes; and the implementation of the two programmes through two workshops, four focus groups, 24 semi-structured interviews, and extensive fieldwork and event participation.

Findings

Phase one of our evaluation finds that the CHDO and WT programmes demonstrably fulfilled their goals in terms of distribution of grant funding as well as widespread and sustained engagement with community groups. Within the given period, over 100 community organizations were funded via 196 health and wellbeing activities, distributed across the ten wards.

Our research also found: **Individual Community Health Development Officers and Well Together's Community Capacity Builders are particular strengths of each programme. They effectively engage with local communities through regular presence in community activities; excellent communication and networking skills; and active partnerships with existing organizations and networks.**

Our analysis found effectiveness in health and wellbeing community activities not only through quantitative assessment of funding, events, and feedback, but also through a qualitative analysis of place-based social relationships, which serve as the building blocks of social infrastructure and healthy, resilient communities.

Portraying medical care and health by counting institutions and financial assets alone obscures the key issues of how and why people access health care, choose healthy behaviours, and maintain healthy communities. As shown in analysis of the ten priority wards, many residents share concerns about sustained accessibility to community assets and organizations, and often suggest improved sharing of information and access. Residents note the ways in which their wards can be unfavourably characterized by those who live elsewhere and by residents themselves, which can encourage community disengagement. As the Community Insight Profiles show, residents are aware of these issues, but many also recognize key assets of their communities, including a strong sense of local neighbourhood identity and local organizations.

A major obstacle to improving health and wellbeing in the ten priority wards is not simply a lack of health resources, but improving access to existing resources. This includes developing and maintaining confidence in health programmes to combat indifference to such activities. Residents access and engage with medical and health infrastructures through social relationships that require trust and familiarity, and – crucially – through social relationships that encourage aspirations and expectations of improved health and wellbeing.

<u>Recommendations</u>

We recommend a continued emphasis on what is called 'rooted research' that focuses on long-term and equitable collaborations with local partners, in contrast to 'parachute projects' and repetitive but unpredictable cycles of new initiatives. As the Community Insight Profiles note, and as organizers of health and wellbeing activities also report, a major challenge facing community health and wellbeing engagement is the tendency to be distracted by novelty rather than investing in continuity. In response: **We highlight the benefit of continuity and recommend a long-term approach to public health initiatives: while policy cycles are usually short, communities have long-term memory.**

A key theme of our research, methodologically as well as in terms of findings, is the nature and quality of social relationships and their role in supporting health and wellbeing. **In phase one we found that the WT and CHDO programmes are crucial in linking residents to existing medical and health provision in the wards, as well as ensuring that vital health infrastructure is accessible and trusted.** One community wellbeing event – such as a coffee morning – provides direct access to other events, whether volunteering at a community larder, accessing social services, or attending a medical screening. **The quality of social relationships provided through the CHDO and WT programmes is therefore an essential foundation for the success of overarching health programmes such as NHS screening and medical provision.**

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1. Introduction

Community Health Development Officers (CHDO) and Well Together (WT) are two novel community health programmes aiming to reduce health inequalities in the ten Oxfordshire wards identified as priority wards: Abingdon Caldecott, Banbury Cross and Neithrop, Banbury Grimsbury and Hightown, Banbury Ruscote, Barton & Sandhills, Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Northfield Brook, Osney & St Thomas, and Rose Hill & Iffley. Health inequalities are differences in health outcomes and access to healthcare. These can include differences in rates of illness, average life expectancy, or the availability of resources such as medical care, healthy and affordable food, or green space.

While wards contain a variety of communities and a range of living conditions, statistics of categories such as 'Barriers to Housing and Services' and 'Income Deprivation' rank these as the 'ten most deprived wards' in Oxfordshire, as well as among the 20% most deprived in England.[1] (more details on priority wards are in sections 2.1 and 2.2) Such statistical ranking, however, does not fully capture the nature of these wards or the issues at stake in developing and sustaining healthy communities.

Statistical averages are useful, but necessarily have limitations. Oxfordshire, for example, has health outcomes that are better than the national average: with male life expectancy of just over 80 years (compared with 79 nationally) and female life expectancy of 84 years (compared with 83 nationally). These figures show Oxfordshire to be a healthy county. Yet, as detailed analysis of Oxfordshire wards shows, the overall county average conceals significant disparities between its communities. The gap in life expectancy between some Oxfordshire wards is as wide as fifteen years.[2] If one categorizes the statistical average of how long people live by ward, instead of by county, this instead demonstrates that some areas of Oxfordshire are significantly below the national average. Contrary to county-level data, ward-level data highlights regions where communities struggle with children living in poverty, substantial unemployment, social isolation, and an inability to live long and healthy lives. Statistics such as those applied to Oxfordshire as a whole can hide substantial health problems by flattening out regions into a homogeneous, quantitative average. Yet these figures can also be used to identify problems, such as the differences in health outcomes between wards, thereby highlighting significant health inequalities. Numerical data – whether statistical averages or population overviews – can be interpreted in a variety of ways. They are thus most accurate, and useful, when accompanied by detailed contextual and qualitative analysis.

[1] Oxfordshire JSNA 2023 Bitesize. See also full details in section 2.2.
[2] Oxfordshire JSNA 2023 'Population'; ONS, National life tables – life expectancy in England and Wales: 2021 to 2023; and as highlighted in the 2019/20 Oxfordshire Director of Public Health Annual Report.

Likewise, characterising a ward as among the 'most deprived in England' does not capture the variety of its neighbourhoods and community resources – but it can help identify problems and suggest areas of focus. If wards are analysed only with statistical averages and numbers, their individual characteristics and strengths are lost. Similarly, **portraying medical care and health by counting institutions and financial assets alone obscures the key issues of how and why people access health care, choose healthy behaviours, and maintain healthy communities.**

This report evaluates two innovative public and community health programmes in Oxfordshire focused on the ten priority wards: Community Health Development Officers (CHDO) and Well Together (WT).

The Community Health Development Officers (CHDO) programme is funded and managed by Oxfordshire County Council Public Health. The aim of the CHDO programme is 'to take a community-based approach to encourage health and wellbeing, communicate health messages and facilitate health-enabling activities to build social capacity and resilience in the profiled communities.' There are six Oxfordshire Community Health Development Officers (CHDOs), either part-time (responsible for one ward) or full-time (responsible for two to three wards). Their responsibilities include health and wellbeing network building, community engagement, and the allocation of small grants (£25,000 for each of the ten wards). A key objective is to work with local partners in order to implement health and wellbeing recommendations from Community Insight Profiles, requiring CHDOs to work flexibly and closely in response to local needs and initiatives.

Well Together (WT) is also a grant-allocation and community capacity building programme, but with a different structure and design. The WT programme is funded by the NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), and is managed by two Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises (VCSE): Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) and Community First Oxfordshire (CFO). The management structure of the WT programme therefore integrates existing community organizations and their expertise, particularly via the CEO of Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) and the CEO of Community First Oxfordshire (CFO). The WT programme employs five staff members: a Programme Manager and four 'Community Capacity Builders'. Community Capacity Builders (CCB) are responsible for network building, community engagement, developing capacity through local 'anchor' organizations, and the advertisement and allocation of Well Together grants (£100,000 for each of the ten wards). Compared with the CHDO programme, WT provides a more expansive, and more centrally-organized approach to community health and wellbeing, managed and coordinated through two well-established Oxfordshire community voluntary organizations.

Both CHDO and WT programmes are designed to support community health and wellbeing activities that originate within those communities, taking a bottom-up approach to developing and maintaining community health. This support is financial and administrative, but also frequently social, including giving tailored advice on applications, opportunities, and related networks. Staff were first appointed in either 2023 or 2024, and the programmes have been initially funded until mid-2025.[3]

Given the short timeframes of the programmes, their impact will not be demonstrable in population-level data – such as shifts in rates of disease or obesity, or mortality ratios – for many years. In phase one of our evaluation, we therefore use empirical research to analyse the ways in which these programmes have been implemented, and how the programmes engage with community capacity for health and wellbeing, from January to December 2024. In doing so, this evaluation highlights the role of social relationships in developing and maintaining healthy communities. While recognizing the key role that medical and public health structures play in health and wellbeing, **this evaluation focuses on the ways that communities access and engage with such structures: through social relationships that require trust and familiarity, and – crucially – through social relationships that encourage aspirations and expectations of improved health and wellbeing.**

1.1 Methodology

Health is not simply a biological and scientific concept, but is also deeply social and cultural. Understanding what are termed the social determinants of health – the non-medical factors such as income and living environments that can profoundly influence health and wellbeing – is necessary to make sense of health patterns across societies. A crucial part of the social determinants of health are social and cultural practices, including the social and community contexts in which we are born, grow, eat, work, age, socialise, and generally live.[4]

The food we eat, for example – including how such food is prepared as well as how much and when we eat – is shaped by family, religion, culture, and social habits as much as it is by health concerns. Likewise, cholesterol testing or diabetes screening programmes are useful only when such services are accessible and when people choose to access these services. Such choices require awareness of their provision, trust in health providers, and the desire to detect and prevent potential illness. All these depend on social sensibilities and cultural behaviours. Individuals consult friends and family and absorb social norms regarding who and what to trust, before deciding whether or when to access health services and modify lifestyle habits. Indeed,

[3] Since the completion of phase one research in January 2024, CHDO funding has been renewed to 2027.
[4] World Health Organization on the Social Determinants of Health; L.T. Larsen, 'Not merely the absence of disease: A genealogy of the WHO's positive health definition' *History of the Human Sciences* 35:1 (2022).

research demonstrates that simply issuing more information is unlikely to produce greater engagement with public health programmes: rather than assuming a 'knowledge deficit' model, the way information is shared as well as who shares it is crucial to health communication.[5] Medical technologies and public health services – such as disease screening, hospital care, or vaccination – are part of broader social networks and cultural practices, and often only a modest part of what supports and maintains health. In a famous analogy, health and medical care have been described as an iceberg: 'only a very small part floats above the surface of public life. The visible part rests on a far larger but normally submerged basis.'[6] As Healthwatch Oxfordshire's 2021 report on community health and wellbeing recorded, only a small minority of Oxfordshire residents rely on formal medical health services for support. The majority instead turn to friends, families, and spiritual leaders for health and wellbeing guidance.[7]

Our evaluation provides a long-term and expansive approach to public and community health. It examines social attitudes and cultural practices that shape community engagement with health and wellbeing, analysing how these were applied, transformed, or reaffirmed in the implementation of the CHDO and WT programmes. To do so, the research team used a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative evidence. In particular, the evaluation draws on methods from the humanities and social sciences, including community and medical history, and medical anthropology's focused ethnographic study through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and mapping.[8] The evaluation also incorporates long-term health contexts in the ten priority wards as well as long-term cycles of community health funding in order to understand and analyse social and cultural obstacles to community health.

This evaluation was a partnership between Oxfordshire County Council Public Health, the University of Oxford Medical Humanities Research Hub, and Oxfordshire Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprises. Research and evaluation were independently conducted by

[5] British Academy, *Public Trust in Science-for-policy Making*, (2024); Vanderslott et al, 'Attributing public ignorance in vaccination narratives' *Social Science & Medicine* (2022).
[6] C. Webster, ed., *Caring for Health: History and Diversity* (2001), p. 86.
[7] Healthwatch Oxfordshire, 'Oxford's New and Emerging Communities' Views on Wellbeing' (2021).
[8] Atkinson and Fuller, ed, *Wellbeing and Place* (2012); Twells, 'Community history' IHR Making History (2008); Deacon and Donald, 'In search of community history', *Family and Community History*, 7, 1 (2004), 13–18; D. Porter, *Health Citizenship: Essays on Social Medicine and Bio-medical Politics* (2012); D. Porter, 'The Mission of Social History of Medicine: An Historical View,' *Social History of Medicine*, (1995): 345–359; Berridge, 'History in public health: who needs it?' *The Lancet* (2000), 356, 9245: 1923 – 1925; Mold et al, ed. *Lessons from the History of British Health Policy* (2023); Howell, 'Ethnography,' *The Open Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, (2023); T. Ingold, 'That's enough about ethnography', *Journal of ethnography* 4:1 (2014); R.S. Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies* (1994); J.M. Murchison, *Ethnography Essentials* (2010); Ed. L. Roberts, *Mapping Cultures: Place, Practice, Performance* (2010); Pelto and Pelto, 'Studying knowledge, culture, and behavior in applied medical anthropology' *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (1997) 11:147–163; Hahn and Inhorn, eds, *Anthropology and Public Health: Bridging Differences in Culture and Society* (2009).

medical humanities researchers at the University of Oxford: Erica Charters, Yuxin Peng, Urvi Khaitan, Theeba Krishnamoorthy, and Julia Gustavsson. Members of Oxfordshire County Council Public Health, Healthwatch Oxfordshire, Community First Oxfordshire, and Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action provided advice and guidance.

All participatory methods were carefully selected and tailored to research contexts, and our community engagement aligns with the objectives and goals of Oxford University's Participatory Research Programme, which emphasizes trust-building, inclusive interaction, and respect for lived experience.[9] All fieldwork researchers completed research ethics and integrity training, and the project received ethics approval from a subcommittee of the University of Oxford Central Research Ethics Committee Approval (reference R93783/RE001). Researchers ensured that all participants provided informed consent and understood how to withdraw from the study, if they so wished.

The evaluation uses three strands to evaluate the CHDO and WT programmes. **The first strand (section 2) analyses the health and social context of the ten priority wards as well as these particular public health initiatives.** This strand makes use of the Community Insight Profiles and the medical and social histories of public health in Oxfordshire. **The second strand (section 3) analyses the funding and grant activities of the CHDO and WT programmes. The third strand (section 4) examines the implementation and practice of the two programmes.** This was conducted through two workshops, four focus groups, and 24 one-to-one semi-structured interviews with CHDO and WT staff. This research was accompanied by fieldwork visits to CHDOs at their workspaces in local community centres, district councils, and the town hall for formal interviews, informal catch-ups, and event participation. We also attended online and in-person events that CHDOs initiated for local health and wellbeing partners to understand the process of network-building on micro and macro levels.

While researching with the programme staff, we also analysed insights from 26 community groups that had secured funding from either or both programmes. These insights were gathered through one community workshop, 15 semi-structured interviews, and two sets of feedback questionnaires. This provided evidence to analyse the process of grant applications and outcomes from the perspective of community group organizers. Last, to capture community views of community health and the two programmes, we organized mapping activities and conducted brief structured interviews at two major community events (Banbury People's Park, Leys Festival). We also conducted brief structured interviews at the playday at Banbury Princess Diana Park and the Rose Hill Community Cupboard. This provided interviews with a total of 69 community event participants. Alongside, we participated in five community

[9] Researchers also incorporated Healthwatch Oxfordshire's 2023 report on Community Research in Oxfordshire.

activities funded by either or both programmes, analysing content, feedback, and community impact. Given that the CHDO and WT programmes began only in 2023 and 2024, most of their funded community activities were initiated later in 2024. Our phase one evaluation has had little opportunity to substantially engage with the community activities funded by the two programmes (which will be the focus of phase two); the evidence of phase one therefore focuses on the implementation and practice of these two programmes.

1.2 Key Findings

Our phase one evaluation finds that the CHDO and WT programmes demonstrably fulfilled their objectives in terms of distribution of grant funding as well as widespread and sustained engagement with community groups. Within the allocated timeframe, over 100 community organizations were funded via 196 health and wellbeing activities, distributed across the ten wards. Our research found that the individual CHDOs and CCBs are particular strengths of each programme, able to effectively engage with local communities through regular presence in community activities; excellent communication and networking skills; and active partnerships with existing organizations and networks.

Our research finds effectiveness in health and wellbeing community activities not only through quantitative assessment of funding, events, and feedback, but also through a qualitative analysis of place-based social relationships, which serve as the building blocks of social infrastructure and healthy, resilient communities. A key theme of this report, methodologically as well as in terms of findings, is the nature and quality of social relationships and their role in supporting health and wellbeing. We found that the WT and CHDO programmes are crucial in linking residents to existing medical and health provision in the wards, as well as ensuring that key health infrastructure is accessible and trusted.

We note that the context of the ten priority wards is required to understanding the nature of health and wellbeing assets, as well as obstacles to health and wellbeing. In particular, long-term context shows the regularity and frequency with which support for community health has changed, demonstrating a preference for novelty that can come at the expense of reliable and trusted community support. We therefore recommend that, alongside continued support for the two programmes, assessment takes account of long-term contexts of health initiatives and policy – including awareness of the importance of sustainability and continuity, rather than novelty.

2. The Programmes and the Ten Priority Wards

The aim of the CHDO and WT programmes is to work with 'local partners and residents to develop and support initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of the communities that they are working within.' These initiatives draw in part on the Community Insight Profiles, while also linking to Oxfordshire's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). In particular, Oxford's 2023 JSNA highlighted that, while Oxfordshire as a whole was ranked relatively healthy when compared with other English counties, there are 'wide inequalities in health and wellbeing' within Oxfordshire. Statistical data from surveys such as the 2019 English Indices of Deprivation identified ten Oxfordshire wards that faced issues such as considerable Income Deprivation and Health Deprivation and Disability. These are: Abingdon Caldecott, Banbury Cross and Neithrop, Banbury Grimsbury and Hightown, Banbury Ruscote, Barton & Sandhills, Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Northfield Brook, Osney & St Thomas, and Rose Hill & Iffley.

Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health team thus worked with local partners to create Community Insight Profiles, published between 2022 and 2024. These profiles use an asset-based community development model (ABCD), which recognizes that community residents themselves are best-placed to identify and mobilize existing assets – whether individuals, associations, or institutions – in developing and sustaining community connections and activity.[10] Each of the ward's Community Insight Profiles provides statistical detail on ward population, housing, health and wellbeing, employment and poverty, crime and community safety, as well as living environment. Just as crucial, each Community Insight Profile also outlines which local health and wellbeing assets residents identify as important, as well as community views on what they appreciate about their ward and which community issues they would like to see addressed, including challenges to health and wellbeing.

The CHDO and WT programmes build on these Insight Profiles and make use of them as guides in their community activities. Some CHDOs, for example, participated in the production of the community insight profile for their ward(s). The Community Insight Profiles therefore provide the fundamental framework for the CHDO and WT programmes. They do so not only by providing details – qualitative and quantitative – on each of the ten priority wards, but also by outlining what local residents identify as key issues regarding health and wellbeing. **The CHDO and WT programmes thus build on the Community Insight Profiles and also use them in assessing grant applications, while applying the Profiles's strategy of supporting community residents to leverage existing networks and assets. Our evaluation follows this methodology by using the criteria and issues raised in the Profiles to assess the CHDO and WT programmes.**

[10] Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J. (1999). *Leading By Stepping Back: A Guide for City Officials on Building Neighborhood Capacity*.

2.1 The Ten Priority Wards: Community Summaries[11]

Although wards serve as useful administrative units, these can be difficult to assess and portray, in part because boundaries have shifted, in part because different evaluations use different categories of assessment, and in part because wards border one another or have a variety of neighbourhoods within them. Abingdon Caldecott, for example, had its ward boundary redefined in 2015; it is sometimes also disaggregated into Abingdon South and Vale of White Horse. While Abingdon Caldecott's statistics identify areas which struggle with issues of deprivation, residents also note that it is an area with green spaces and a range of community organizations that help support wellbeing. Yet, in a theme that recurs in many wards, residents of Abingdon Caldecott suggest that sustained engagement with community activities is a key problem, hindered by the perception that support is often short-lived and initiatives come from outside rather than from residents themselves.

Likewise, residents of the three priority wards in Banbury -- Banbury Ruscote, Banbury Cross and Neithrop, and Banbury Grimsbury and Hightown – identify key community assets that they frequent, including green spaces, local community centres, and churches and mosques. With statistics that identify higher-than-average levels of unemployment, poverty, and crime, residents express concern with community safety and the cost of community events. Ruscote and Grimsbury & Hightown record significantly lower-than-average life expectancy, with high rates of mortality from respiratory diseases. Residents in all three wards recommend improved communication and networking of wellbeing activities, tailored to local residents – noting cultural and religious diversity in Banbury as a whole (Banbury Grimsbury and Hightown, for example, have an Asian, Asian British, or Asian Welsh population of 14.5%; Banbury Cross and Neithrop of 9.6%; compared with the Oxfordshire average of 6.4%).

In Oxford, the four wards of Rose Hill & Iffley, Littlemore, Northfield Brook, and Blackbird Leys are neighbouring wards, with Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook often combined as 'the Leys'. Residents of these wards note social, cultural, and ethnic diversity as a strength, with statistical data highlighting that each ward has a higher proportion of non-White residents than the Oxfordshire average. Community Insight Profiles also capture residents of all four wards identifying local community health and wellbeing activities as key community assets, as well as a strong sense of local identity. At the same time, statistical data show Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook to have male life expectancy rates significantly lower than the Oxfordshire average, and residents note that while there are various health and wellbeing services available in Oxford, access to these vary depending on transport links as well as issues of time or even

[11] Data for section 2.2 and 2.3 use: Oxfordshire Community Insight reports, data, and profiles for the ten wards; ONS Census 2021; Oxfordshire Local Area Inequalities Dashboard; Local Authority Health Profiles; Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, 2019 and 2023; and Oxfordshire County Council Director of Public Health Annual Reports.

mistrust of authorities. Residents were also aware of higher-than-average crime rates, and observed that community assets – such as parks – could become unsafe or inaccessible at night. Suggestions included ensuring that green spaces remained accessible while also improving access to health and medical provision, as well as improved information communication and networks of community resources and opportunities.

The Oxford ward of Barton & Sandhills is northeast of Oxford city, and includes Barton, Barton Park, and the Sandhills estate. While statistical data classify this ward as having life expectancy lower than the Oxfordshire average, the Community Insight Profile focused on Barton and Barton Park, given that Sandhills is demographically different from Barton and Barton Park. Barton and Barton Park residents identified a number of key community assets, including green spaces, an active community association, and a central Neighbourhood Centre. At the same time, residents requested more sustained health and wellbeing services, as well as ways to ensure accessibility of community assets and organizations – including improved networking and public transportation.

Likewise, the ward of Osney & St Thomas combines various neighbourhoods; its Community Insight Profile focused on the communities of St. Thomas, St Ebbe's, Friars Wharf, and Grandpont. This region is in central Oxford City, which includes a high student population; the Community Insight reporting focused on areas with a high proportion of social housing. Residents identified a range of community assets and organizations, ranging from activities for families and greenspaces, to skills training and housing support. At the same time, residents identified issues with housing – with a significant homeless population in Oxford City – and recommended improved provision for free or low-cost community spaces.

To capture community views of health and wellbeing, as well as research on activities funded by CHDO-allocated grants, we organized mapping activities and conducted brief structured interviews at major community events in summer 2024.[12] This resulted in 31 interviews with 69 community event participants. The interviewees were young parents, children and teenagers, staff and volunteers of local health and wellbeing groups, church workers, retired people, NHS workers, and independent artists. Most lived locally, and had a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Some were first- or second-generation immigrants.

A few common themes emerged in views of healthy communities.[13] Half (n=30) mentioned sports and exercise as ways to keep healthy; many discussed the importance of being outdoors

[12] Leys Festival 28 July 2024; Banbury Playdays 31 July 2024, 14 August 2024.

[13] Interviews asked 5 questions: What changes do you want to see to make [community] a healthier place? Who do you think will make these changes happen? What do you do to keep healthy: What resources do you need to maintain these healthy habits? What is a healthy community?

for themselves and their children. They also expressed desires for safer and cleaner parks, more guided walks tailored for adolescents and the elderly, cycle routes separated from major roads, and lower subscription fees for the local gyms. Walking was the most popular way of exercising, followed by biking and swimming. Near one quarter (n=12) mentioned healthy eating; many noted the importance of having affordable access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

In discussions on the use of parks and nature reserves, people expressed desires for more bins, better arrangements of exercise equipment tailored to different age groups and, repeatedly, the desire to feel safe in such spaces. Banbury residents, for example, expressed concerns about the drug-dealing and gang activities in the local parks, and many remarked that they observed a rise of incidents after the closure of local youth clubs. Such concerns were even more in evidence at the 2024 Playday at Bretch Hill, which took place a week after a midnight stabbing in the People's Park. One 13-year-old boy expressed worries that he would be a target for gangs if he walked down certain areas in the Spiceball Park. Residents also noted that while the Bridge Street Community Garden was a popular, well-designed space for local groups to meet and organise diverse health and wellbeing activities for Banbury residents, it was also occasionally used by drug dealers and users due to its convenient location.

Parks and other green spaces can thus be highly valued community assets for health, while also well-known locations for anti-social behaviours. **Residents' observations suggest that identifying community assets is only the first stage in improving health and wellbeing; they also require regular and long-term maintenance, as well as awareness of their use and how such patterns can shift throughout a day.**

2.2 The Ten Priority Wards: Statistical Data

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) are a weighted combination of seven domains: Income (22.5%); Employment (22.5%); Education, Skills and Training (13.5%); Health Deprivation and Disability (13.5%); Crime (9.3%); Barriers to Housing and Services (9.3%); and Living Environment (9.3%). Oxfordshire contains 17 out of 407 Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the two most deprived IMD deciles of 1 and 2. LSOAs are units used by the ONS: 'made up of groups of Output Areas (OAs), usually four or five. They comprise between 400 and 1,200 households and usually have a resident population between 1,000 and 3,000 persons.'[14]

Experiences of deprivation are not uniform across the wards and there are important differences to consider, as well as the limitation of understanding communities via statistical comparisons. The average IMD score (on a scale of 1-10, 1 being most deprived) for LSOAs in Oxfordshire is 8. However, the LSOAs in the ten wards have a score of 2 – with the exception of

[14] ONS Statistical Geographies.

Northfield Brook 18B which has the lowest score of 1. This indicates that there are wide gaps in outcomes within these wards and within the Oxfordshire average.

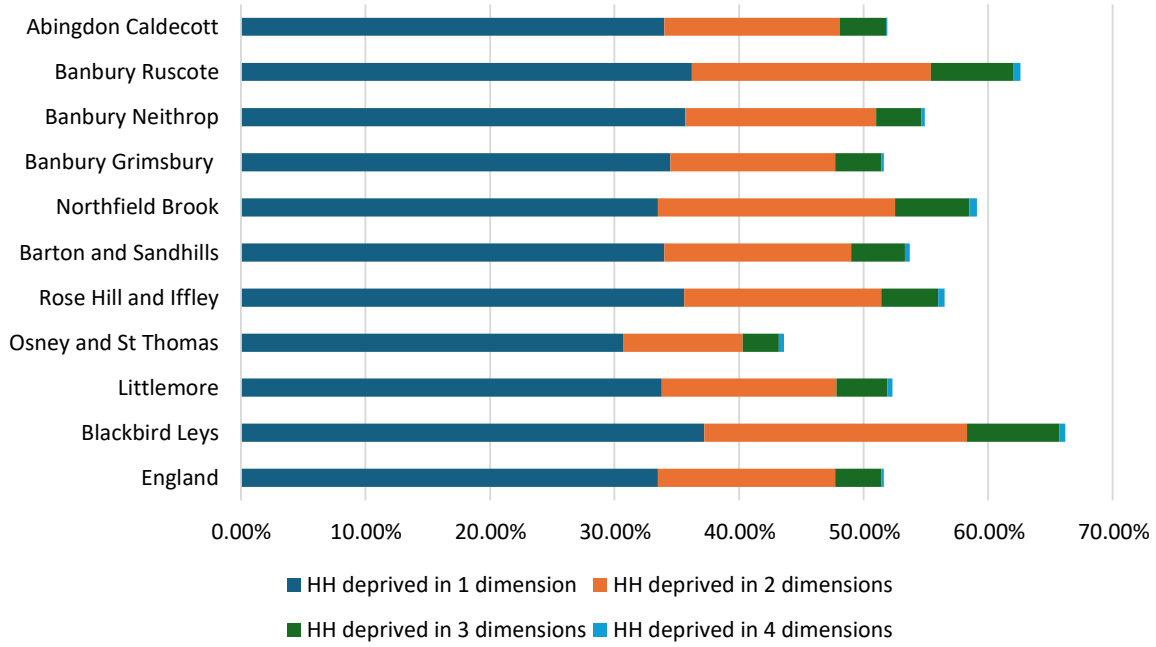
Table 1. Deprivation Scores

MSOA	Deprivation score	% of children under 16 living in poverty	% of adults over 60 living in poverty
Blackbird Leys	34.9	25.2	22.4
Littlemore and Rose Hill	29.6	28.8	18.6
Barton	28.8	23.4	20.6
Iffley Fields	15.1	14.5	16.1
East Central Oxford	18.1	13.1	18.1
Banbury Grimsbury	23.9	16	19.4
Banbury Neithrop	26.8	17.5	18.6
Banbury Ruscote	34	25.6	20.8
Abingdon South	15.6	16.2	9.6

Source: Oxfordshire Local Area Inequalities Dashboard (MSOA is middle-layer super output area, which is made up of groups of 4-5 LSOAs)

Figure 1 data are based on the measure of household deprivation collected for the 2021 Census, which is different from the measure of deprivation in the IMD. The Census captures granular household-level data, giving us a measure of deprivation based on four dimensions: education, employment, health and disability, and household overcrowding. While the IMD gives us data at the level of LSOA, the Census gives us data at the lowest level of the OA or Output Area, i.e., while the IMD provides data by neighbourhood, the Census gives us data by household. The IMD as an area-based measure brings together several datasets and has a much broader understanding of deprivation. More information on the differences between the two can be found here.

Figure 1. Households in deprivation according to the Census



Source: ONS, Census 2021

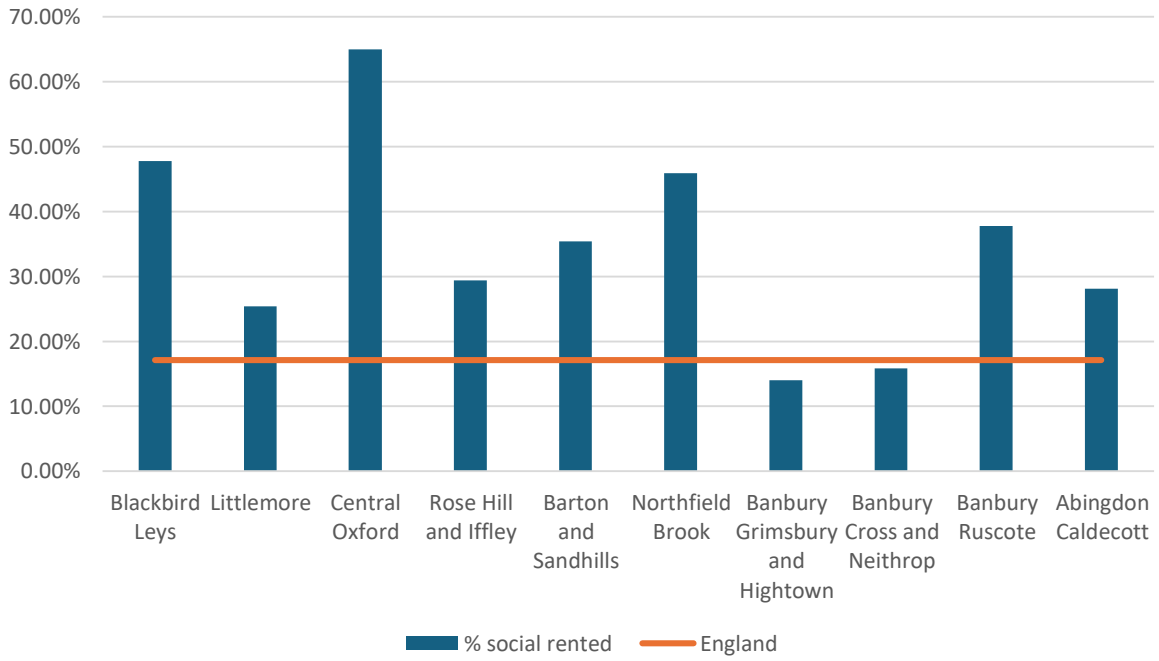
With the exception of OST, the rates of people engaged in routine and semi-routine occupations is high. These occupations are often manual and service occupations that are considered 'working class'.

Figure 2. Socio-economic classification of the ten wards

	Higher managerial, admin and professional occupations	Lower managerial, admin and professional occupations	Intermediate occupations	Small employers and own account workers	Lower supervisory and technical occupations	Semi-routine occupations	Routine occupations	Never worked and long-term unemployed	Full-time students
England	13.20%	19.90%	11.40%	10.60%	5.30%	11.30%	12%	8.50%	7.70%
Blackbird Leys	5%	11.50%	10.40%	6.60%	7.00%	18.30%	21.90%	11.80%	7.60%
Littlemore	14.80%	18.40%	9.60%	8.60%	5.80%	12.70%	15.10%	8.10%	6.80%
Central Oxford	9.60%	10.80%	7.70%	5.40%	5.30%	10.70%	13.10%	10.60%	26.80%
OST	23.90%	16.10%	5.80%	4.70%	2.00%	5.50%	4.60%	4.50%	33%
Rose Hill and Iffley	14.10%	16.80%	9.70%	9.00%	6.60%	12.60%	13.50%	9.90%	7.80%
Barton and Sandhills	13.20%	17.70%	10.60%	7.20%	5.20%	12.50%	17.50%	8.70%	7.50%
Northfield Brook	8.70%	16.80%	10.70%	7.20%	6.60%	16.60%	18.10%	8%	7.20%
Banbury Grimsbury	10.10%	17.30%	10%	8.90%	7.10%	14.60%	21.50%	6.10%	4.40%
Banbury Neithrop	10.10%	17.10%	10.10%	8.30%	7.00%	15.50%	19.60%	7.90%	4.40%
Banbury Ruscote	6.10%	13.60%	9.50%	9.10%	7.20%	17.40%	22.10%	9%	6%
Abingdon Caldecott	15.60%	19.90%	11.70%	8.40%	5.80%	11.90%	14.90%	7.40%	4.20%

Source: Census 2021

Figure 3. Social housing in the ten priority areas



Source: Local Insight Profiles and Census 2021

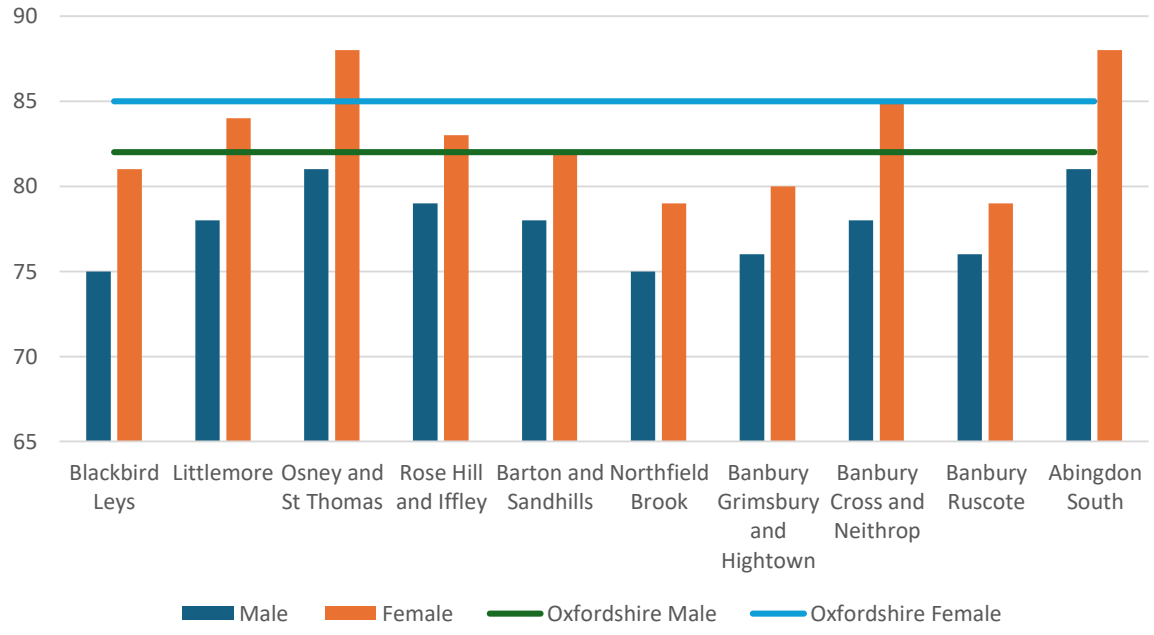
The percentage of people receiving allowances and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) tends to be higher than the national average. It is difficult to find data for Banbury and Abingdon; the table below shows the data for Oxford. The disparity between males and females is striking – especially in Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Barton, Rose Hill and Northfield Brook.

Table 2. People receiving social care allowances in Oxford

	Attendance Allowance	**PIP**	**Male PIP**	**Female PIP**	**Mental Health PIP**	**Respiratory Disease PIP**	**Disability Living Allowance**	**Universal Credit**
England	*11.70%*	*7.90%*	*7.20%*	*8.60%*	*2.90%*	*0.30%*	*2.00%*	*3.70%*
Blackbird Leys	13.60%	11.60%	9.70%	14.10%	5.40%	1.00%	4.00%	6.00%
Littlemore	10.90%	9.60%	7.40%	9.90%	4.60%	0.00%	4.10%	5.90%
Osney and St Thomas	11.10%	3.60%	4.30%	3.20%	1.70%	0.20%	1.30%	3.60%
Rose Hill and Iffley	11.10%	9.20%	7.50%	10.30%	3.90%	0.40%	3.00%	4.60%
Barton and Sandhills	7.10%	9.20%	8.30%	10.50%	4.40%	0.90%	3.50%	5%
Northfield Brook	12.80%	11.30%	9.80%	13.40%	3.80%	0.60%	4.70%	6.20%

Source: Local Insight Profiles

Figure 4. Life expectancy in the ten wards

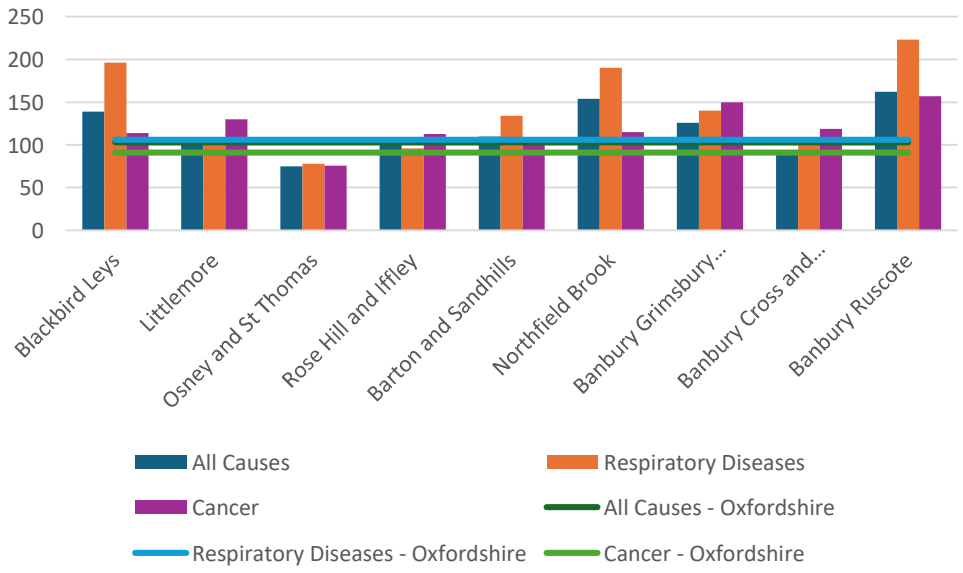


Note: Data are for Abingdon South as Abingdon Caldecott data could not be located.

Source: Local Insight Profiles, Census 2021 and Oxfordshire Local Area Inequalities Dashboard

Respiratory diseases, the third biggest cause of death in England, are a leading cause of mortality in Oxfordshire. These include lung cancer, pneumonia, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Indeed, mortality from such respiratory diseases is high in Blackbird Leys, Barton, Northfield Brook, Banbury Grimsbury and Ruscote.

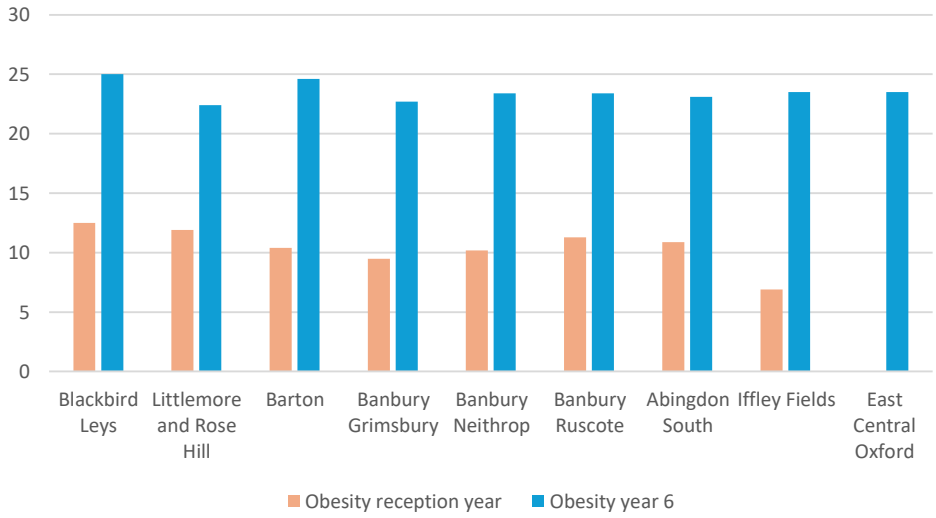
Figure 5. Mortality ratios



Source: Local Insight Profiles and Census 2021

Another focus of community health programmes in Oxfordshire is healthy eating and access to healthy food. This received greater impetus and focus recently, as reflected in the Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2022-23, titled 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Communities, Healthy Lives.' Although Oxfordshire's rates of obesity and overweight children are lower than England's averages, Barton and the Leys have higher rates.

Figure 6. Obesity among children



Source: Oxfordshire Local Area Inequalities Dashboard

More information on local food environments can be found in this interactive map that shows childhood obesity and the prevalence of fast-food outlets. It also shows how many food retailers can be accessed with a 10-minute walk. For most of Oxfordshire, especially rural areas, this is 0. Access to healthy and affordable food is limited across Oxfordshire, not just in the deprived wards.[15]

Green Assets

While Oxfordshire contains substantial areas of green space, data show that use of and access to these regions vary. Barriers included: old age, long-term health conditions, disability, and 'being too busy at work or home'.[16]

Oxfordshire covers 2605km^2, but publicly accessible green space is only about 50-109km^2. The majority of the 700km^2 greenspace is not publicly accessible. A report by the Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery found 197 neighbourhoods in England which have poor public

[15] See Oxfordshire County Council's March 2024 report on food strategy.
[16] Oxfordshire County Council, Mental Wellbeing Needs Assessment report (2021), p. 83.

greenspace access, and 7 of these are in the 30% most deprived areas in Oxfordshire: Abingdon, Banbury, Littlemore, Blackbird Leys, and Northfield Brook. Some of these areas, in particular those in Blackbird Leys, also experience overcrowding of what green space is available.[17]

Funding

Some wards have had success at mobilizing funding, likely because of the high community needs in these areas: Blackbird Leys and Osney & St Thomas far exceed the others, although Rose Hill and Northfield Brook also perform well here. However, when looking at how funding from national organizations translates to per-person spending, Rose Hill is clearly underserved. Funding data show distinct variation by ward, as well as tangible community engagement and mobilization.

This table shows Oxford funding from national grant giving organizations.[18]

Table 3. Funding grants

	National Lottery Community funding per 1,000 population, 2004-21	**Total grants awarded from major funders per head, 2019**
England	*38,346*	*34*
Blackbird Leys	269,115	138
Littlemore	37,714	195
Osney and St Thomas	338,136	567
Rose Hill and Iffley	105,976	8
Barton and Sandhills	72,400	35
Northfield Brook	105,963	29

Source: Local Insight Profiles

Overall, the ten priority wards in Oxfordshire thus vary in terms of demographic, financial, and health patterns, as well as in types of assets. They also vary in terms of residents' suggestions and recommendations for improvement. At the same time, many residents of these wards share concerns regarding sustained accessibility to community assets and organizations, and often suggest improved communication and networks of opportunities.[19] Likewise, ward-level statistical data of health and wellbeing indicators – such as deprivation scores and life expectancy at birth – identify the challenges that residents face in these

[17] Leverhulme Centre for Nature Recovery Report, pp. 16-17.
[18] Data for Banbury and Abingdon were not able to be located.
[19] This builds on Healthwatch Oxfordshire research into health and wellbeing: 2021 Research Report; 2022 Research Report on Albanian and Arabic Speaking Communities; 2022 Research Report on the Sudanese Community in Oxford; 2024 Research Report on community food support in OX4.

wards. Ward residents also note the ways in which their wards can be unfavourably characterized by those who live elsewhere and by residents themselves, which can encourage community disengagement. As the Community Insight Profiles demonstrate, residents are aware of these issues, but many also recognize key assets of their communities, including a strong sense of local neighbourhood identity and local organizations.

2.3 The Programmes in Context

The initial catalyst for the CHDO and WT programmes was Oxfordshire's Director of Public Health 2019-20 Annual Report, which highlighted 'hidden inequalities in a prospering Oxfordshire'. The Covid-19 pandemic further exposed health inequalities, and tangibly reiterated the need for public health programmes (such as vaccination) to work with local communities for successful implementation.[20] At the same time, the CHDO and WT programmes draw on a long history of addressing public health through preventative community-based measures.

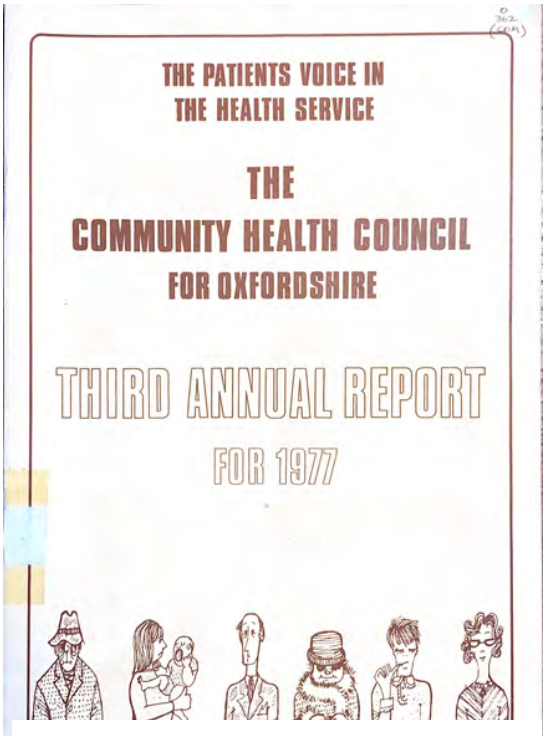
Authorities, whether political, religious, social, or medical, have long worked to track and identify patterns of illness and mortality in general populations, and thereby intervene in order to improve overall rates of health. Some notable early practices include the recording and analysis of mortality via parish registers (begun in the Tudor period to detect plague outbreaks) and nineteenth-century civil registration (which provided statistics of types and rates of both disease and mortality). Nineteenth-century sanitarians collected and compared morbidity and mortality rates in order to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy localities as well as among different occupations in England. Such data were then leveraged to induce government intervention via local expenditure and environmental conditions to improve health. Landmark reports such as Edwin Chadwick's 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, for example, marshalled extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence to argue that environmental conditions – poor living conditions such as overcrowding, lack of clean water, and poor drainage – caused high levels of ill-health and mortality. By comparing morbidity and mortality rates between types of workers (e.g. industrial vs agricultural labourers) as well as between localities, Chadwick's report used comparative statistics to pinpoint poor sanitation and living conditions, not just poverty alone, as the culprits behind poor health.[21]

[20] Also relevant is the NHS's 2019 Long Term Plan setting out key actions to reduce healthcare inequalities; see also Healthwatch Oxfordshire's 2021 report on wellbeing.

[21] Hamlin, *Public Health and Social Justice in the Age of Chadwick: Britain 1800-1854*; Crook and O'Hara (eds), *Statistics and the public sphere: numbers and the people in modern Britain, 1800-2000* (2011).

Comparisons of health, income, and geographical statistics thus have a long history in policy discussions underpinning the practice of public health. As Chadwick's report and its reception reminds us, debates over explanations of poor health, and of what measures are most apt, are not a recent phenomenon. While many were hostile to Chadwickian intervention via central authorities that interfered with local practices, ensuing sanitary and public health regulations also effectively improved the health of England's labouring classes – particularly through the development of approaches such as the Health of Towns Association, which complemented central initiatives through local campaigns. Public health strategies have thus long highlighted the nature of such interventions, including the effectiveness, virtuousness, and sustainability of programmes that work at local levels and *with* communities.[22]

Likewise, reports and initiatives have long continued to highlight differences in health outcomes – whether classified by geography, economics, type of employment, or demographic categories such as ethnicity and gender. Whether described as health inequalities, health variations, or simply excess death, such differences have long been a concern to communities and policy makers alike. The establishment of the National Health Service in 1948 was in part designed to address the problem of health inequalities in England, but as Brian Abel Smith complained in 1978, 'despite 30 years of the National Health Service, mortality rates are in general a third higher in Wales than in East Anglia…[and] the differences in mortality rates between social classes, are if anything getting wider rather than narrower.'[23]



Annual Report (1977) of the Oxfordshire CHC

By the 1970s, health inequalities were increasingly discussed and scrutinised, and used in calls for reform, including those leading to the reorganization of the NHS in 1974. The reorganization, also considered as shaped by the community health movement, aimed to tie health services into closer collaboration with local communities in order to address local needs and hold health services accountable. One such mechanism was the establishment of Community Health Councils, which were formed to safeguard the interests of local communities and work for

[22] Pelling, "'Progress, difficulties, suggestions and reforms': *Public Health* 1888-1974" *Public Health* (1988); Crook, *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, c. 1830-1910* (2016); Mold et al, *Lessons from the History of British Health Policy* (2023).
[23] Qtd in Webster, *The National Health Service: A Political History* (2002), p. 137.

increased health equity and promote the interests of overlooked groups. Attention was re-focused on the problem of health inequalities through the Black Report of 1980 (*Inequalities in Health*), and its emphasis on material and structural explanations for differential health outcomes was echoed in the 1998 Acheson Report (*Our Healthier Nation*), the 2010 'Marmot review' (*Fair Society, Healthy Lives*), and the 2020 follow-up *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On*, among various publications.[24]

For local communities, the effect of these reports, commissions, and policy debates is cycles of public health funding. Given policy pressures to produce new initiatives, reports, and measures, those working in community health note the frequency with which programmes are re-named or re-defined, while administrative, financial, or political support likewise follows policy cycles of re-definition. The health economist Uwe Reinhardt accordingly observes a cyclical process of reform, attempted implementation of change, before a return to more reform, in healthcare systems such as the NHS.[25] At local levels, including Oxfordshire, such changes can be seen in the 2003 abolition of the Community Health Councils replaced by Public and Patient Involvement Forums, which were then replaced in 2008 by Local Involvement Networks (LINk). These were replaced in turn in 2011 by Healthwatch (Oxfordshire), with substantial reorganization in 2016. While each organization had slightly different responsibilities and structures, these changes also capture what one individual, with 18 years of experience in the Oxfordshire community sector, described as the flawed but human urge to 'do something new' and 'constantly rebadge,' resulting in 'parachute projects' which are short-lived, well-intentioned, but ultimately problematic, interventions.[26]

As research in global health demonstrates, as well as being ethically questionable what defines so-called parachute projects or parachute science (sometimes also referred to as colonial science) is not simply that it is conducted by outsiders, but also how it is conducted – in consisting of quick activities, akin to a parachute landing. Such short programmes 'fail to establish long term, equitable collaborations with local partners.'[27] The result is long-term distrust by local communities, who necessarily question the motivation of such health programmes. In response, scholars have called for intentionally collaborative research practices, described as 'rooted research' that better supports sustained global and public health

[24] For overarching reviews: Powell and Exworthy, 'Improving health and tackling health inequalities: what role for the NHS?' in *The NHS at 75: The State of UK Health Policy* (2023); Dowler and Spencer, ed, *Challenging Health Inequalities: From Acheson to Choosing Health* (2007).
[25] Uwe Reinhardt, *Accountable Health Care* (1998).
[26] Well Together staff 1, interview 29 Oct 2024.
[27] Odeny B, Bosurgi R (2022) Time to end parachute science. PLoS Med 19(9): e1004099; see also Heymann et al., 'Partnerships, not Parachutists, for Zika Research' *N Eng J. Med* (2016) 1504-1505.

– and is particularly important for communities that are already distrustful of outside or central actors.[28]

Although initiated by developments in 2019-2020, the CHDO and WT programmes also draw on years of public health research and practice. Applying methodologies of building community capacity, trust, and sustainability, they are designed to mobilize assets, networks, and resources from within communities – avoiding the pitfalls of parachute projects. Both programmes intentionally recruit staff with experience of working for community organizations. The two programmes also share an emphasis on building community networks of trust. At the same time, the two programmes are comparably small scale, and designed to work within existing infrastructure, rather than overturning or creating entirely new ways of working.

[28] Yzwiak et al, 'Roots, Not Parachutes: Research Collaborations combat Outbreaks' *Cell* (2016).

3. Funding Allocation

One of the key responsibilities of the CHDO and WT programmes is the allocation of funding to community groups and organizations. The Community Insight Profile Grant Funding allocated through the CHDO programme provides up to £25,000 for each of the ten wards; the Well Together grants provide up to £100,000 for each of the ten wards. The CHDO programme expected that successful applicants will receive funding between £500 and £5,000 per grant, while the WT programme anticipated that the average grant will be between £3,000 and £15,000. Both programmes aim to award a minimum of one year of funding to successful applicants.

3.1 CHDO Funding Allocation: CIP Grants

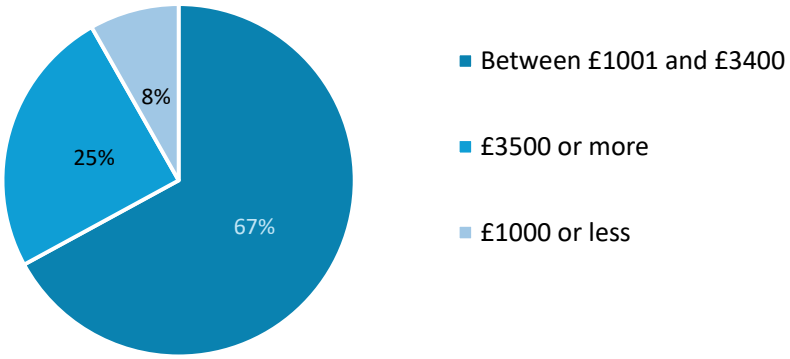
The CHDO Community Insight Profile (CIP) Grant Funding was advertised through flyers, posters, email circulations, and webpage announcements, with CHDOs available to discuss and help support applications. Applications were discussed and scored by a panel of community members and partners, taking into consideration criteria as outlined below. Most community groups received the results of their applications within three months. Given staggered starting times of each CHDO, Insight Profile Grants were allocated starting in July 2023 and final disbursement was completed in August 2024.

Information to applicants explains that most awards range between £500 and £5000, and that eligibility is focused on projects that aim to 'improve the Health and Wellbeing of local people by addressing the outcomes of the Community Insight Profiles.' Applicants were encouraged to discuss their proposals with relevant CHDOs, as well as to partner with relevant local organizations. One steering committee outlined its scoring criteria as:

1. How well the applicant addresses the outcomes of the Community Insight Profile and seeks to improve the Health and Wellbeing of the local community (60%)
2. How well the applicant demonstrates the skills and ability to deliver community projects (10%)
3. How well the applicant demonstrates an understanding of the target area (10%)
4. To what degree the applicant seeks to work in partnership with other groups/organizations and to reach and engage the residents in these groups (10%)
5. To what degree the project seeks to be sustainable once the funding period has ended (10%)

Analysing CIP grant data, we found that, overall, the allocation process was successful. It fulfilled its requirements regarding funding grants, timeline, and project criteria. In particular, a total of 85 projects were funded (with a total of 68 organizations funded), spread across the ten

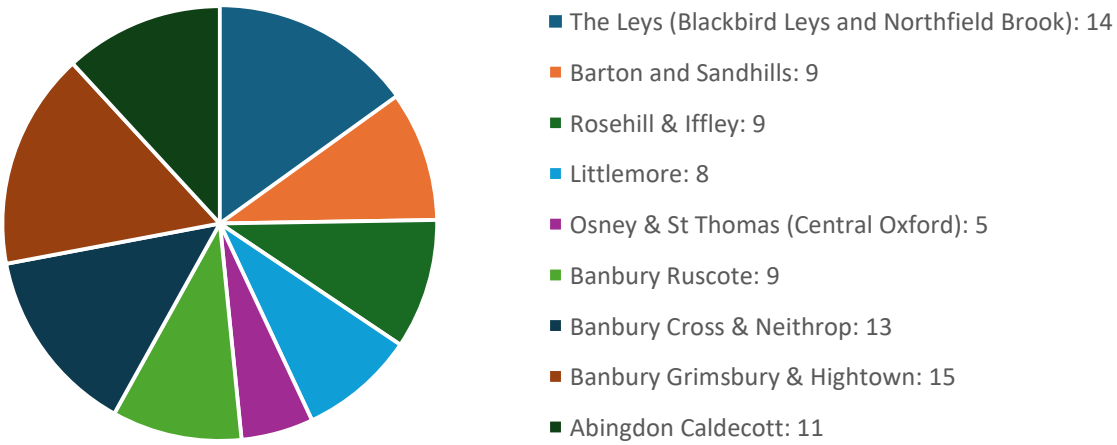
Figure 7. CIP Project Funding:
Amount of Funding Allocated across 85 projects



wards. A total of £245 061 was allocated, out of £250 000 available (£25 000 per each of the ten wards). Applicants received notification of funding decisions in less than three months. As discussed in section 4.4, feedback from funded organizations described the CIP application and grant process as 'straightforward' and 'quick', especially when compared with other community funding applications.

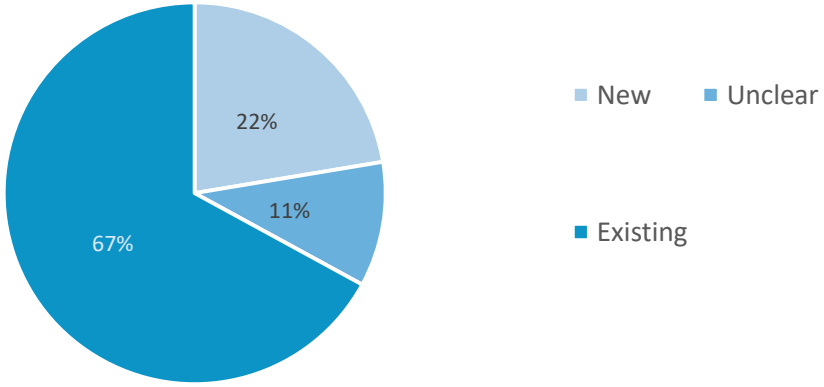
For the 85 funded projects, the average grant awarded was £2 530. Twenty-one projects (25%) received grants of £3500 or more, with the largest grant £7 000, while 7 projects (8%) received grants of £1000 or less, with the smallest grant £210. The majority (n=57, or 67%) received between £1001 and £3400 in funding. Grant data demonstrated that scoring criteria, particularly relevance to individual Community Insight Profiles, was consistently applied. Projects per ward were also evenly spread, ranging from Osney & St Thomas (5 projects) to Banbury Grimsby & Hightown (15 projects), with an average of 8.5 projects funded per ward. We also analysed whether a project was new or a 'pilot' project. Out of 85 total projects, 57 (67%) were not new projects, 19 (22%) were new or pilot projects, and for 9 (11%) we were unable to establish novelty.

Figure 8. CIP: Grants per Ward out of 85 Grants



Health and wellbeing issues addressed by each project were often in multiple categories, given that projects frequently overlapped and that some criteria are more specific and easier to define – but no more significant -- than others (e.g. early cancer diagnosis vs reducing social isolation). For this stage of the evaluation, although we were able to identify that each ward applied relevant CIP criteria to assess applications, we were not able to categorize these into coherent overarching health and wellbeing categories given the timeline and type of data submitted. We also lacked complete data from each ward in terms of duration of projects and frequency of activities, as well as estimated number of participants. With more detailed data from CIP-funded activities to be submitted in 2025, it will be possible to quantitatively analyse the impact of these projects in the second phase of evaluation.

Figure 9. CIP Project Funding: Sustained vs New Projects



The CHDO programme of CIP Grant Funding was successful in terms of timeline, amount, and geographic range. While more data and analysis are required to establish the reach and impact of funded activities, preliminary analysis demonstrates that a majority of CIP funding supports the continuation and sustainability of existing community health and wellbeing activities.

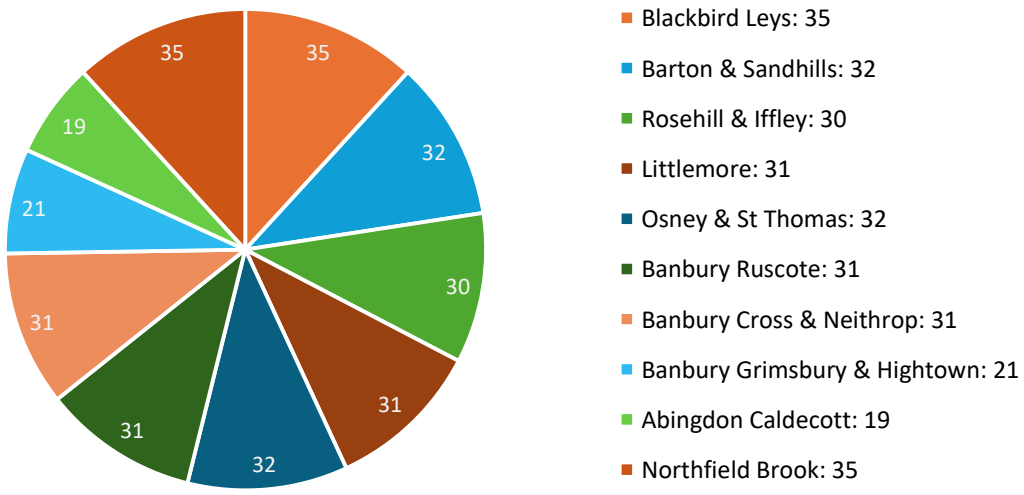
3.2 WT Funding Allocation

Given the larger amount of funding available, the Well Together programme incorporated an expression of interest (EoI) stage (available from Dec 2023) which enabled case-by-case support on the application stage. This approach is designed to encourage and guide individuals and groups who are first-time applicants (see section 4.3) Due to the large volume of EoI for Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys (47 in total), the WT team closed the EoIs for BL and Greater Leys in March 2024, while the other eight wards followed the original deadline of 31 July 2024. WT funds began disbursing grants in April 2024 and completed this process in November 2024.

While WT grant allocation is similar to the CIP in that it invests in community health and wellbeing projects in the ten priority areas, it outlines support for people 'who might be experiencing poorer than average health access and outcomes' while also making use of categories of healthcare inequalities as identified by the NHS: hence support for parents and babies (especially for ethnic minority communities); mental health support; early cancer diagnosis; physical activity; encouraging healthy weight loss; smoking cessation; reducing harmful drinking or drug behaviours; dental care access; and encouraging longer-term health through activities such as health checks.[29] It was estimated that grants provided would range between £3 000 and £15 000.

In total, £880 624 in funding was allocated (88% of total funding available), with 107 organizations funded via 111 projects. The average project grant was £7 934, with 41 projects receiving grants of £10 000 or more (37%) and 8 projects receiving grants of £3 000 or less (7%); the majority (n=62 or 56%) received grants above £3000 and below £10 000. The smallest grant allocated was £1 705, while the largest grant was £20 000. Funding was therefore allocated within its estimated financial range as well as within its proposed timeframe. Preliminary research found that funded organizations consider the WT application process to be straightforward. More details on the application process are in section 4.3.

Figure 10. WT-funded activities by ward



While data on whether funded projects were novel or sustained was more difficult to establish, at least 73 of funded projects were confirmed as ongoing or sustaining activity (66%), with the

[29] This draws on the NHS Core20PLUS5 approach to reducing healthcare inequalities.

remaining 38 projects (34%) unclear. Given the larger amount of WT funding allocated, its grants generally supported projects located in multiple wards. Only 35 projects (32%) were focused on a single ward; the remaining 76 (69%) were active in at least two wards. Funded activities were therefore spread relatively evenly across all ten areas.

WT grants were also categorized by WT staff according to which health inequality the activity addressed. The majority engaged with multiple health issues; only around 15 of the 111 funded activities (14%) addressed a sole health issue. The table below outlines funded activities according to which health inequalities they each addressed, as categorized by WT assessments.

Table 4. WT funded projects by category

Addressed Health Inequality	**Number of Funded Projects**
Mental health support	80
Reducing harmful drinking or drug behaviours	8
Promoting social connection and reducing isolation	81
Promoting or supporting access to healthy eating	50
Increasing physical activity	58
Early cancer diagnosis	3
Encouraging target populations to attend health checks	12
Maternity care	15
Dental care for children	4
Smoking cessation	2

The WT Grant Funding Allocation was successful in terms of timeline, amount, and geographic range, and supported a range of activities, with mental health support, social connections, and the promotion of physical activity and healthy eating a predominant focus. While more data and analysis are required to establish the reach and impact of funded activities, preliminary analysis demonstrates that a majority of WT funding supports the continuation and sustainability of existing community health and wellbeing activities.

4. The Programmes in Practice

While these programmes were initiated in 2023 and 2024, their key activities developed late in 2024. For example, WT aimed to distribute 20% of their funding by April 2024; the majority of their grants were not disbursed until late 2024, resulting in groups and networks engaging in their planned activities from late 2024 and 2025. Likewise, although CHDO grants were allocated mostly in 2024, many of the funded events and networks started in late 2024. Given this short time frame, the impact of the WT and CHDO programmes cannot be fully captured by this first phase of the evaluation, which ran from January to December 2024. More broadly, the impact of these programmes will not be demonstrable in population-level data – such as shifts in mortality rates – for some years, if not an entire generation.

Phase one of the evaluation therefore focuses on the *implementation* of the two programmes. Relying predominantly on the Focused Ethnography (FE) approach in applied anthropology, it analyses the ways in which CHDO and WT staff conducted their roles and their reflections on the role and programmes, as well as feedback from funded organizers and a small number of participants at CHDO- and WT-funded activities. It focuses on social relationships, cultural practices, and community dynamics to evaluate the effectiveness of these two health programmes.

Interviews, research workshops, focus groups, and in-person visits were conducted with CHDOs and WT staff. Specifically, two research workshops (March and July 2024) and four focus groups were held with CHDO and WT staff, allowing them to discuss first-hand insights and experiences of working in the ten wards and the process of grant application and allocation. In-person visits and one-on-one interviews were also held with all CHDOs and WT Community Capacity Builders. These semi-structured interviews and fieldwork visits allowed observation of the working methods of staff in their community locations, while fieldwork observation of events hosted by CHDOs provided insights into the process of network-building on micro and macro levels. Interviews and focus groups were also held with the CHDO programme manager, the WT programme manager, project development manager of CFO who oversaw the allocation of the Caldecott Community Grant Fund, CEOs of the two community groups (CFO, OCVA) who oversaw the WT programme, and the Oxford Hub CEO who oversaw the participatory grant making process in the Leys. Interviews encouraged reflections on the process of building and maintaining community networks, including obstacles which tested the resilience and flexibility of networks as well as the roles of the programme staff.

4.1 CHDO and WT Roles and Activities

CHDOs and WT Community Capacity Builders (CCBs) play a key role in developing and supporting community engagement, including by encouraging community residents to apply for funding as well as to participate in networks and events. Moreover, compared to the county councils' grant-allocating programmes in the past, CHDO and WT programmes are novel in their personalized approach. CHDOs are expected to take a 'community-based' approach to the health and wellbeing tasks in the wards they are responsible for. This demands them to 'wear different shoes' (Gerti, CHDO Leys) in order to understand the locally identified needs of the community members, facilitate the community groups' delivery of health and wellbeing activities, and communicate the expectations and outcomes to the management committee of the councils' public health team.

A CHDO has multiple responsibilities including but not limited to: small grant allocation, health and wellbeing network building, and community engagement. A primary responsibility of CHDOs is to work with local partners in order to implement health and wellbeing recommendations from Community Insight Profiles. Their posts are embedded in the City or District Councils; they also report to the County Council's Public Health team every quarter. CHDOs are given time and flexibility to make connections with the communities they are responsible for. The post allows hybrid and remote working, which encourages officers to spend much of their time in the communities. CHDOs report to the County Council every quarter, and the report is structured with general and open-ended questions about not only outcomes but also the challenges they are facing.

There are six Oxfordshire CHDOs. There are two types of contracts for the CHDOs: part-time (0.4-0.6 FTE) for one ward, or full-time for two to three wards. The CHDOs also started in different months between January 2023 and April 2024 and their work began at different stages of the programme, tied to the development of Community Insight Profiles in each ward. The CHDO programme is therefore flexibly and locally structured, closely drawing on individual Community Insight Profiles and their recommendations.

Well Together is co-established by two community organizations: Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) and Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA). It is a grant-allocation and community-capacity building programme funded by a statutory NHS body: the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB). The staff employed by the Well Together programme for community engagement are Community Capacity Builders (CCBs). Like the CHDOs, their work involves advertisement and allocation of the Well Together grants as well as network building and community engagement. There are four CCBs and they are on part-time contracts with Community First Oxfordshire. The CCBs are

supervised by one manager employed through Community First Oxfordshire and one coordinator from Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action. Overseeing the WT programme are the CEO of Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action and the CEO of Community First Oxfordshire, providing community coordination and expertise. Compared with the CHDO programme, the Well Together programme therefore provides a larger, more expansive, and more centrally-coordinated approach to community and public health and wellbeing.

Despite differences in organizational structures and timeframes, the two programmes share similarities in their aims and approaches, as well as in their definitions of community health and wellbeing. Both support a variety of activities and networks that address key community health issues such as early health education, youth activities, support for elderly people, family activities focused on wellbeing, women's support, healthy eating support, mental health networks, and connecting with nature. Overall, both programmes fund and support groups and activities that promote public health at a local, community level; they therefore also frequently work together to share information and coordinate overlapping activities, including funding.

All six CHDOs and all four WT CCBs are women, from a range of ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds. None of the CHDOs is a resident of the wards they serve. Most, however, had experience growing up, working, and living in regions or even nearby neighbourhoods that faced similar issues of health inequalities. For WT, two CCBs are residents of the priority wards they support; the other two live close to priority wards and have experience working in similar communities. What is most notable in their skillset is the ability to engage with a variety of individuals, most often through empathetic engagement and communication at multiple levels, alongside an ability to balance short- and medium-term responsibilities. All six CHDOs and four WT CCBs are outgoing and personable, able to articulate the social and cultural issues at the heart of Oxfordshire health inequalities, with practical and pragmatic views on community wellbeing.

4.2 Community Engagement

As identified in the Community Insight Profiles (see 2.1), and as outlined in their job description, CHDOs and CCBs are meant to support community engagement. This necessarily requires residents to trust them, seeing them as part of their social connections which can provide guidance and share opportunities, but who also in return will listen to and understand issues shared by local residents. Our evaluation identified that this is best achieved through: **regular presence in community activities; excellent communication and networking skills; and active partnerships with existing organizations and networks**. We outline examples of these types of engagement here.

4.2.1 Community Presence

An example of the crucial role of community presence is the Leys CHDO's activity at the Community Larder. As the Leys CHDO was appointed only in early 2024 (as maternity cover), and therefore was not part of early community research for the Community Insight Profile, she was able to understand and identify key health issues in the ward by spending every Wednesday at the Community Larder, which also allowed her to gain the trust of community residents and organizations.

The Community Larder is a provider of low-cost surplus food to the residents. Such food services are common in many of the ten wards (including Barton, Banbury, and Rose Hill), and are often set up within existing community buildings (e.g. churches). Although food provision was initially limited to canned food, fizzy drinks, or long-life milk, the Barton CHDO noted that obtaining fridges meant that they were able to offer fresh dairy products, fruits, and vegetables. Community larders allow CHDOs to monitor the accessibility of healthy fresh food, and to get to know and be known by local residents. CHDOs, for example, help with the delivery of food in their car or carry boxes of bread to tables, making themselves visible, known, and approachable to volunteers as well as community residents. This also allows for informal conversations on the topic of local health and wellbeing issues, and builds trust between community organizations and residents and the CHDO. As the Leys CHDO explained, 'because I'm on the ground and I see these people all the time, I know which groups need a bit more support…some groups are really good at…running sessions…but they're not very good at applying for funding. I'm there nudging them and helping with the paperwork.'[30] The Leys CHDO therefore spends most of her time in the local Leisure Centre or the Blackbird Leys Oxford Hub.

The CHDOs' and CCBs' frequent presence in the community spaces makes them visible to the local groups and individuals. This in-person attendance also enables them to better understand the place. The CHDOs who have their offices based in the local community centres or other similar venues (e.g. Town Hall, Oxford Hub) in the areas have found it convenient to access community events, especially when weekly larders are held in these community spaces.

The case study of a week with Alexa, full-time CHDO for Rose Hill and Littlemore, demonstrates the variety of locations and activities involved (figure 11). Alexa's week is multi-sited and multi-grouped. She requires flexible work hours, and sometimes works in the evenings and on the weekends for network meetings and community events. This week was also prior to the start of

[30] Interview July 2024.

activities and events funded by the Insight Grants, which will have her attend more community events as a result.

Figure 11. A week with Alexa, full-time CHDO for Rose Hill and Littlemore

MONDAY: home, Rose Hill Community Centre, St Mary and St Nicholas Church Littlemore.

- E-meet with programme manager, via to-do list of work; emails; attend electric blanket testing at Rose Hill Community Centre; meet with older people who participated in this event; catch-up with people who come to the coffee morning at the church

TUESDAY: Rose Hill Community Centre.

- Help at community larder; catch-up with those who come to the larder and volunteers – residents of Rose Hill, Littlemore, and nearby neighbourhoods; meet with SOFEA leader; meet with Oxford City customer service office; attend Rose Hill Network meeting (evening)

WEDNESDAY: home, Rose Hill Community Centre, St Mary and St Nicholas Church Littlemore.

- Internal team meeting or online training; meet with Littlemore Community Partnership, Littlemore Health and Wellbeing Group; catch-up with people who come to the coffee morning in the church

THURSDAY: John Henry Newman School, Littlemore

- Liaise with SOFEA on possibility of having larder held at school for Littlemore residents, explore possibility of new hub to attract more community members by holding quarterly health and wellbeing partnership meetings there

FRIDAY: home, Rose Hill Community Centre, John Henry School Littlemore

- Collect products from hygiene bank to deliver to Rose Hill Community Centre; emails; catch-up with community members and groups; help the food hub advertise for more donations

WEEKENDS:

- occasional community festivals and playdays in order to talk to community members

4.2.2 Communication and Networking

CHDOs and CCBs need to be trusted by community residents, particularly by those who may perceive 'the Council' or NHS 'officers' as problematic or intimidating individuals. CHDOs and CCBs therefore also need to be seen as members of the community, even if they do not necessarily live in that locality. Staff noted that, if they are introduced in roles akin to council or NHS officers, they are associated with issues such as council tax or policing social behaviours, resulting in social distancing or even distrust from residents who may, for example, have unpaid council bills or continuing medical issues – even though CHDOs and CCBs are in a position to offer advice and support with such issues.

Alexa, CHDO for Rose Hill and Littlemore, explained that she had first been employed in customer service for British Gas, before becoming a customer service officer at Oxford City

Council for nine years. In those roles, she noted that her responsibilities were mainly 'helping people in the community,' particularly in solving problems such as late payments or repairs. By helping people identify practical solutions to their problems, Alexa gained a sense of achievement while also recognizing the social contexts of wellbeing. As she explains, 'I think it was coming from that customer service background of just generally wanting to help people, seeing the needs that are out there. It kind of led into the role within the community.' Her role as CHDO thus builds on her employment experience, but also reflects her identification with residents who struggle with various day-to-day issues.

Alexa explains that although she does not live in Rose Hill or Littlemore, the two wards that she serves, she did grow up in the neighbouring ward of Blackbird Leys. This, combined with her nine years of experience working at Oxford City Council, means that she is knowledgeable about the types of services available to residents in her CHDO wards while also familiar with their neighbourhood. As she remarks, 'usually nine times out of ten you have, like, an immediate rapport of recognition. … We're from the same background, you know, even if we're not from the same background. But we've lived in the same area, we've experienced some of the same things…there's already, like, a rapport, like you recognise something in that person.'

More fundamentally, Alexa is able to understand and articulate the struggle that residents face, including how social attitudes, cultural behaviours, and financial concerns shape health and wellbeing. Having grown up in one of the ten priority wards, she was part of the System Changers programme, designed to 'support people to develop a sense of agency'. As she describes, part of what residents face are constant financial anxieties, which obscure health and wellbeing goals. From their perspective, she explains:

> I'm not thinking about, oh, I need to go for a walk or I need to go to the gym, or I need to…go to that community group because, you're thinking I've got to pay this and I'm not going to be able to pay for that because I don't have the money to pay for my basic needs…if you're worrying and stressing about, how am I putting food on the table, your first thought isn't always, how do I stay mobile so that I'm looking after the old version of me.

As Alexa also notes, obstacles to health and wellbeing aren't only financial. In explaining why she applied for the CHDO role, she reflected on her own changes in attitude when she was growing up. When younger, 'I wasn't caring so much about the future, I wasn't thinking about my health and wellbeing.' What helped change her outlook was discussions with others on her attitude towards her life plans, including what she hoped her children might end up doing in their lives. She notes that 'mindset' and 'attitude' are crucial, including having local role models for young people because it shows them 'you can learn from that, you can gain experience, you

can prove that you have got something of value within you.' Alexa is thus able to draw on her own life experiences, including as a mother of three, alongside years of training in customer service and at Oxford City Council, to identify with local residents and help support their community interests.[31]

CCBs have roles very similar to CHDOs, and often directly support a large number of organizations, not only through funding allocation but also by providing support and connecting groups. Jane, one of the CCBs for Oxford and Abingdon, supports 35 community groups in those two areas, building on her previous employment as a schoolteacher and a Play Development Officer. Jane has lived in East Oxford for 30 years, and helped to revitalize her own community (Florence Park) through the community centre, creating a community newsletter, running street parties, and being a co-founder of Flo's – The Place in the Park. Likewise, as a part-time CCB, Assia supports around 30 groups in Banbury's three priority wards. Born in Pakistan, Assia has lived in Banbury since the age of two, and draws on her long experience working with community groups in Banbury in her role as CCB.

Prior to her CCB role, Assia worked for Thames Valley Police, as well as working for over 17 years with the Sunrise Multicultural Project, a charity that supports 'ethnic minority families in Banbury.' As Assia explains, Sunrise is open to all cultures, and provides support for a variety of health and wellbeing activities, including reducing social isolation, assisting victims of domestic abuse, and providing support for exercise, skill training, and healthy eating. In that role, Assia drew on her experiences as a Muslim woman who grew up in Banbury, following up requests by children and parents for activities such as sport and art scheduled at times convenient for children who attended mosque after school, or women-only swimming classes for Muslim girls. Her many years running a charity in Banbury means that Assia is familiar with the challenges that charitable organizers face, as well as knowledgeable about opportunities and networks. Most group organizers and council workers we interviewed knew Assia by name, as many had worked with her prior to her role as CCB.

This position as 'insider' for Banbury community organizations means that Assia is trusted by those in the community. Moreover, she often offers her help and guidance, particularly for groups that have no prior experience with funding applications or charity administration. She explained that, for those who had problems completing the application form, she typed up what they told her and provided guidance on how to complete a budget, shepherding them through the funding process. Making use of her local networks and her experience in running a charity, Assia put three churches in touch with each other so they could benefit from the shared employment of a project coordinator, allowing them to be supported in a way that would not have been successful if they had each applied for funding individually. As she stated,

[31] Quotations from workshops (May 2024, July 2024); semi-structured interviews (Sept 2024, Dec 2024).

‘It takes a whole village to raise a child; if you don’t communicate with each other, it’s not going to work. You can’t be in one corner running your own stuff and hiding things. You’ve got to work together to be able to support the community.’[32]

4.2.3 Community Partnerships

Partnership working is a key part of CHDOs and CCBs community engagement, as it effectively advertises local health and wellbeing activities while also helping to avoid duplication and encourage networking.

In some areas, such as the three wards in Banbury, a strong network (the Brighter Futures in Banbury Partnership) already existed between the Cherwell District Council (CDC) and the local health and wellbeing groups. The partnership meets quarterly and has been joined by new local initiatives. The Banbury CHDO made effective use of this partnership, allocating CIP grants through its connections. By partnering and building on the existing network, the CHDO helped with the organization and coordination of the Banbury playdays, providing further community engagement with local residents and community organizers. As a result, after only a year in post, many local organizations and residents know the Banbury CHDO by name and regard her as key contact for community issues.

Some Oxford wards, such as Barton, the Leys, and Rose Hill, have local health and wellbeing networks that existed prior to the establishment of CHDO roles. CHDOs in these wards have inherited the role of chairing partnership meetings, as well as the challenge of gaining trust from partners who may have had more years of experience in these areas and these fields. CHDOs noted that regular outreach and updates, as well as commitment to their role, helped to gain the trust of pre-existing networks. At the same time, the financial capital that CHDOs and CCBs can access through grant allocations also helps them navigate such partnerships.

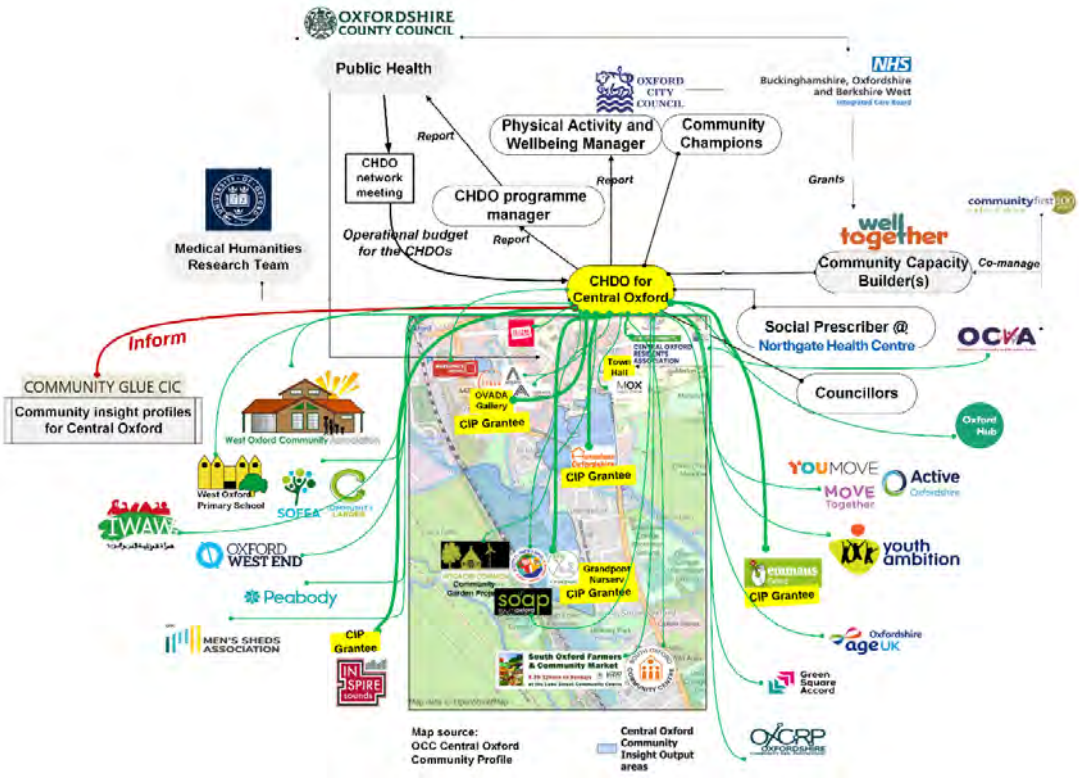
In contrast to wards with established partnerships, the areas of Central Oxford and Abingdon Caldecott are likely too small or fragmented to have had prior health and wellbeing networks. The task for CHDOs in these wards was to establish new partnerships. The CHDO for Central Oxford, for instance, has established a ‘Central Oxford Steering Group Meeting’ with the area’s locality manager. In less than one year, the attendees have grown from four (mainly council workers) to sixteen, with 42 on the mailing list. The meeting we attended in October 2024 demonstrated a diversity of attendees: members from three local community groups (CIP grants recipients), two community researchers (part of the insights gathering for Central Oxford), two CCBs, three councillors, three officers from the City Council, and two researchers

[32] Quotation from focus groups (Aug 2024, Oct 2024) and semi-structured interviews (Nov 2024, Dec 2024).

from the University of Oxford. The Oxford CHDO has also helped local residents establish a residents' association through the Oxford Town Hall.

In Figure 12, the range of partnerships of the Central Oxford CHDO (0.4 FTE) during her first six months in the role is mapped, demonstrating partnerships involved in the role.

Figure 12. Central Oxford CHDO's local connections, as of Oct 2024



4.3 Well Together Application Support

While both the CHDO and the WT programmes assist funding applicants, WT provides structured support through its 'Grants Plus Approach'. This builds on its use previously in OCVA and CFO's Connected Communities Fund, and thus allows WT personnel to draw on their experience with such methods in community funding applications. In general, the 'grants-plus approach' encourages those unfamiliar with or intimidated by funding applications to participate, by breaking down the application process into stages with support along the way. As Laura and Emily, joint lead organizers of Well Together, explain, 'it's about bringing people into a system' where they can access support and funding, and starting the process off by simply suggesting, 'let's have a conversation.' Such a format is designed to engage people who may not consider completing an online form or feel unable to write a summary of their plans.

At the same time, the WT programme recognizes that community organizations have likely worked alongside each other for some years, and may feel that 'some people get funding and some people don't…creating winners and losers and a system of feeling it's not fair.' By contrast, the 'grants plus approach' provides feedback and revision at each stage, with WT staff encouraged to put applicants and organizations in touch with each other if it will strengthen their projects and the potential to obtain funding. Laura and Emily therefore describe the application process as 'building relationships', rather than a competition.[33]

The first stage in WT applications is a community drop-in held in each of the ten priority wards, which were used to introduce grant opportunities to the ten priority wards in person. The community spaces for these sessions were carefully selected, usually using the assets identified in the Community Insight Profiles. Most drop-ins took place in January and February 2024, and were one-off (for each ward) two-hour events aimed at first-time applicants and new community initiatives. CCBs used their connections to encourage attendance, along with more traditional forms of advertisement, including targeted communications to registered charities, community interest companies, and social enterprises.

Second is an online Expression of Interest form submitted on the website, which opened in December 2023. These had different deadlines according to each ward, though flexibility was provided if an applicant struggled to meet a deadline. Overall, 147 EoIs were received, with larger numbers than predicted submitted for some wards. Table 5 shows the number of EoI received per ward.

Table 5. WT EoIs received per ward

Abingdon Caldecott	24
Banbury Grimsbury	30
Banbury Ruscote and Neithrop (2 wards combined)	40
Barton	37
Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys (2 wards combined)	47
Littlemore	39
Oxford Central	33
Rose Hill	42

EoIs also varied by issue addressed, as demonstrated in table 6.

[33] Qts from interview (Oct 2024).

Table 6. WT EoIs received by category

Dental care for children	3
Early cancer diagnosis	5
Encouraging target populations to attend health checks	18
Healthy eating	61
Increasing physical activity	77
Maternity care	17
Mental health support	110
Promoting social connection and reducing isolation	110
Reducing harmful drinking and drug behaviours	15
Smoking cessation	6

CCBs reviewed the EoIs submitted in their ward, and, if needed, held further discussions with applications who might need additional support or information for their applications. These discussions could be via email, online, or in-person, and sometimes even in small groups. Such follow-up discussion took place according to applicants' time schedule, sometimes taking place outside of a CCB's usual work hours. Some activity organizers whom we interviewed noted that a CCB visited their group to offer additional support. Overall, activity organizers suggested that this was a constructive part of the application process.

Case Study: WT application guidance session, the Leys

Dolcie (CCB, Oxford) organised a support session for Well Together applicants in Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys on a Sunday afternoon in March. This was held at the Leys leisure centre on the ground floor, which was easy to locate. In total, 13 people attended. Participants included two members from the Oxford Community Action Group (OCA), an 'anchor organization' for the Well Together programme, one local councillor, and representatives from the Sudanese and Swahili communities.

During the session, Dolcie explained the grant process as well as how applications would be assessed. She emphasised that applications needed to 'hit the criteria' as outlined. She suggested applications be specific in their activities, even narrowing their focus if necessary. She brought her computer to show the grant details via the online platform and to help participants become familiar with details of the application.

Participants expressed gratitude for this extra support; one participant explained that their community had been neglected in such funding for 'too long', and therefore wanted to submit an application.

As well as using the review of EoI to strengthen applications, CCBs also used EoIs to link individuals and community groups. This micro-scale partnership can help small groups meet grant criteria while also being cost-effective. Rachel (CCB Barton and Littlemore) explained that this required 'deep listening and reflection' to understand the project ambitions of potential applicants as well as knowledge of relevant community networks and organizations.

Case study: WT supporting local connections in grant applications

Vincent and his son Max, local to Barton, wished to start parkour training for local children and young people. Max is a parkour professional, and competes internationally. He was once a school refuser; the only days he would go to school was when his father promised to take him to parkour training in the evenings. Given that his participation in the sport changed his life, Max wanted to work with children and young people who faced similar difficulties, while making use of his parkour skills. Rachel (CCB Barton and Littlemore) met with Vincent and Max and reconnected them with the Barton Community Association and Sport in Mind, a national mental health sports charity funded by Well Together. Rachel invited Oxford Parkour Activities and Sport in Mind to the Well Together drop in event for Littlemore residents and organizations held at John Henry Newman Primary School's community hub. This provided them with the opportunity to plan work together, jointly running a series of sessions with Barton Park Primary School.

Oxford Parkour Activities, for children aged 7 to 11, was granted WT funding for activities in Barton and Littlemore.

Comments from successful applicants frequently described the WT application process as 'fairly straightforward.' One noted 'we really like the EoI approach as it is helpful to know from the very beginning…whether we are eligible.' Some applicants appreciated having additional support through the application process – such as visits from WT staff, while others found that WT staff visits and feedback were unnecessary. As a result, the 'grant-plus approach' clearly helps support those who are inexperienced applicants, but for those who identify as more experienced organizers, feedback suggests that they may not want such additional stages or may prefer a different timeframe for applications. One applicant commented, 'As an experienced fundraiser I did not need too much extra support, but I could tell from the community drop-ins that there are applicants who would be benefited by the support at the EoI stage.'[34]

[34] The EOI feedback was collected as part of the analysis in section 4.5.

4.4 Funded Organizations

By working with CHDOs, we were able to analyse insights from 26 community groups that secured funding from either or both programmes. These insights were gathered through one community workshop, 15 semi-structured interviews, and two sets of feedback questionnaires. This provided preliminary evidence to analyse the process of grant applications and outcomes from the perspective of community group organizers.

The community groups we analysed are located in a range of the priority wards (Abingdon, Banbury, Barton, Oxford, as well as in multiple wards). While the majority are based locally, two are national organizations and one is international. Only four were established in the past five years; the majority are older than ten years, with the oldest founded in 1942. They also range in size: six organizations have more than six paid employees who work full time (or equivalent in part-time), with two among these described as very large (over 40 paid full-time employees); three have between two to six paid full-time (or equivalent) employees. The majority are run either entirely by volunteers or employ one or fewer full-time paid employees. Organizations also offer a varied array of health and wellbeing activities, ranging from exercise and sports, or support for people who are homeless, to musical activities as well as more tailored education programmes that offer training in cooking or social and mental health skills.

The size and frequency of activities run by these organizations also vary, capturing the range of events supported by the WT and CHDO programmes. Less than a third cater to large groups (50 or more participants); the majority host events that support 10 to 20 participants, on either a weekly or monthly basis. Likewise, organizers vary in their account of how they officially evaluate their activities, as well as what they would consider a successful activity. For external evaluation, a handful of organizers explained detailed surveys and tracking of participation, whereas the majority noted combinations of the number of participants and qualitative reporting such as individual stories or participant feedback. By contrast, for their own measurement of success, all of them mentioned feedback or participant enjoyment, even contrasting the official need for 'data' with other forms of impact. As one organizer explained, 'I think numbers…are important. But they don't give the whole picture. … I want to hear from the people who benefit, why they benefitted.' Likewise, another remarked, 'I always think that numbers never really show the impact because you can be supporting a small number of people, but the difference you're making can be huge.'

The groups vary slightly in terms of their experience in submitting funding applications. No organizations selected 'none' in terms of their experience with community funding; the majority instead selected 'some experience' (10 groups). However, it was noted that when asked how many times they had previously applied for funding, at least five in this category

mentioned experience with applications over multiple years. As a result, according to the number of times that groups had previously applied for funding, all except two organizations had submitted more than five previous funding applications, and many noted years of experience in charitable fundraising – which also suggests that many groups do not identify as 'experts' in the application process, even if they have years of experience. Notably, the organizations were close to evenly split as to how many of them had applied to other sources to fund the particular activity that had received either WT or CHDO financial support, with 10 of the 26 having only applied to WT/CIP. Supporting the suggestive quantitative analysis of the general WT and CHDO funding allocations in section 3, the overwhelming majority of funded groups are thus experienced organizations that have been offering key community health and wellbeing services for some years.

Similarly to feedback on the WT EOI process, the funded organizers almost all agreed that the application process was straightforward, with 6 adding that these were easier to complete than many applications, and a handful also noting that the CIP grants are particularly straightforward with decisions made quickly. While a few grantees seemed unaware of the difference between the WT and CIP funding and application forms, sometimes confusing the two programmes, two were aware of the differences between these two funding programmes, and noted that they were indeed different in terms of time frame and aims, with CIP being identified as 'easy' and 'quick', and WT as longer with a longer time frame for decisions, tied to larger amounts of funding. One grantee observed that while the CIP application process meant he had to read the Community Insight Profile, 'that then benefits me when I'm writing another application…this is current findings, feedback from the residents, that I can then reference…in my applications for larger grants.'

More tangibly, when asked what would have happened to their activities if they had not received WT or CIP funding, 8 of the 26 explained that they would not have been able to offer the activity in any form, 5 of the 26 suggested they would have had to severely modify the activity or limit its reach, 10 were uncertain what they would have done, and 3 suggested they would have sourced funding from another area of their organization. This built on what organizations also report in terms of their key obstacles, not only in obtaining funding, but also simply in offering their activities: lack of sustained funding.

In terms of identifying general challenges, while some organizations noted difficulties with advertising and with recruiting trained volunteers, most frequently mentioned the value of sustained funding, that is, funding that is 'consistent'; 'security of funding'; or 'continued funding across multiple years'.

When fundraisers were asked what their biggest challenges were in terms of obtaining funding, two themes emerged. The first was increasing competition as funding sources decreased while charitable activity increased; as one fundraiser explained, 'When I started fundraising [10+ years previously], it was one in every four applications you made…was successful. Now it's 1 in 10, maybe sometimes 1 in 20…it's really competitive.'

The second challenge was sourcing funding that was described as sustained, 'regular', or continuous. This second theme, of a lack of sustained funding, is in many ways related to the challenge of a competitive funding landscape. Fundraisers observed that they needed to submit more applications, and more frequently, while also noting the drain on organizations when there was less certainty of continued funding. In particular, fundraisers noted that they were frequently challenged by demands for novelty, whereas they wished to prioritize sustainability and reliability. As one fundraiser explained:

> They [funders] often want it to do new things, while what we want is the continuity of our priority projects, to provide consistent support to our community. There is the insecurity of being able to run long term projects. One of our values as a charity is longevity. We believe that estates like [local ward] need long term support. They don't need drop-in projects that run for six weeks and never again.

Likewise, one fundraiser identified struggling with funders focusing on novelty, especially prioritizing 'new groups,' while another noted that frequent policy changes encouraged funding changes without taking account of what was already working.

Organizations funded through WT and CIP grants therefore generally agree that their funding procedures are straightforward and efficient, with small differences between CIP and WT funding in terms of time scale and process, relating to the size of grants. Organizers recognize the usefulness of quantitative data in assessing community health and wellbeing activities but also emphasize the importance of qualitative evidence in capturing and conveying effectiveness. Although the majority of fundraisers have multiple years of experience in charitable fundraising, they do not necessarily identify as 'expert' fundraisers. They agree, however, that one of their key priorities – and key challenges as charitable organizations – is obtaining sustainable and reliable funding.

4.5 Community Residents

Although CHDO and WT funded activities only started late in this evaluation, we were able to conduct pilot fieldwork in five community groups, and gather feedback from a number of participants. Given that this only provides observations on those who participate in such

activities, analysis is necessarily limited. Nonetheless, this initial survey suggests that residents engage with such activities, and rely on them for a variety of types of support.

For example, the Rose Hill Community Cupboard, which runs weekly, provides a hot meal as well as canned food (requiring a third-party referral) and fresh vegetables (requiring registration with the Cupboard) from the Food Bank to take away. The group is run by one staff member and supported by around 15 volunteers from the Rose Hill Methodist Church. The group secured a CIP grant for two weekly activities: the Community Cupboard and the Coffee Morning for elderly residents in Rose Hill and Littlemore. In one day in November 2024, 36 people visited, some of them queuing outside in the cold for 45 minutes before doors opened at 1.15 pm, to secure better food options. Although some came to collect food, many stayed for the free hot meal, chatting with each other. Four of the 20 individuals interviewed struggled with English, while all offered a variety of responses to questions of what they would change to make Rose Hill and Littlemore a healthier place. Most, however, agreed that walking and eating healthy food – particularly vegetables – was their strategy for health. This activity catered to the immediate provision of food, but it was also clear that the hot lunch encouraged social interaction and connections.

Likewise, arts and crafts sessions organized by the Iraqi Women Art and War (IWAW), an activity coordinated by one individual and in receipt of grants from both the CHDO and WT programmes, are advertised as an art activity. However, when we attended, the female participants explained that the sessions helped them – many of them being recent arrivals in England – get to know others with similar life experiences, learn English customs as well as the language, and receive coaching and support with IT and other life skills. As one participant explained, the women in the group 'support me for language, to speak and to talk, because [my first language is] Arabic. I need to know what's going on, how to support myself, my children, and my family, who are not here in this country.' The participants also help each other with deliveries of fruits and vegetables from the Food Bank, and it was noted that the support provided substantially helps the participants' wellbeing, given that many of them have dealt with adverse life events and may struggle to speak openly about issues even with medical professionals.

Bridge Street Community Garden activities (Banbury), December 2024,
from Bridge Street Community Garden Instagram

The Bridge Street Community Garden (part of Banbury Community Action Group) similarly provides a range of activities under the umbrella of health and wellbeing. Run by one staff and supported by a small number of volunteers, it received WT and CIP funding. The Bridge Street Garden is located in central Banbury, providing a community garden in the midst of the city centre. It frequently combines garden-based events with other health activities: in June-July 2024, for example, it hosted gardening sessions with the Orchard Recovery Group of the mental health charity Restore; a herb and flower picking and pressing workshop for refugee women with the Sunrise Multicultural Project; and free tai chi and yoga sessions in the garden. The Bridge Street Community Garden thus functions as a resource and location for health and wellbeing community groups to make use of, including via local collaborations.

At a coffee morning at Barton's St Mary's Church funded by the Barton CIP grant, seven participants had tea and cake, and discussed how attending helped them with their overall health. In contrast with other funded activities we observed, this group was attended by more men than women, a demographic that community events can struggle to engage. When asked why they came to the coffee mornings, one man explained, 'I was on my own with no friends after my wife passed away, but now with the help and support from this group I am a volunteer at the food larder, meeting people, loving life.' As with the other activities, participants often described attendance at one event as a way to access other activities and services. Indeed, the coffee morning advertised a health event happening the next day at nearby Wood Farm, at which people could participate in various medical screenings, while another participant received guidance from the social prescribers from Hedena Health (in partnership with the Barton CHDO) on how to obtain a blue badge for better parking access.

Barton Coffee Morning, November 2024,
from St Mary's Church Barton Facebook

Participants were, unsurprisingly, generally unaware who funded the events they attend, and also were unconcerned with official titles of organizers – such as whether someone was a CHDO or CCB. Instead, most relied on first names. At the same time, it is clear that **one community event – such as a coffee morning – provides direct access to other events, whether volunteering at the community larder, accessing other social services, or going to a medical screening. Such forms of 'foundational prevention' are crucial, as these provide 'social infrastructure that generates the social capital which enables people to lead healthy lives.'[35] Summer community Playdays, for example, organized by the Oxfordshire Play Association, were funded by their local CIP grants and hosted a number of outdoor activities for families alongside stalls supporting health and medical resources such as NHS Health Checks Oxfordshire, smoking cessation, Sanctuary support housing, and local food larders. An event designed for one type of activity often serves as an access point to other health and wellbeing activities, including OCC and NHS services, showing the various networks among community health and wellbeing activities that CHDO and WT funding and collaborations support, as well as their linkages to public health and medical services.**

[35] Demos, *Counting What Matters* (2024), p. 11.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

The CHDO and WT programmes demonstrably succeed in fulfilling their stated aims and objectives, whether measured by grant allocation data or by community relationships. Individual CHDOs and CCBs show themselves to be part of local communities, with a strong presence in each neighbourhood and working in partnership with residents as well as established community organizations. In particular, our phase one research identifies that CHDOs and CCBs contribute to the building and strengthening of community health and wellbeing capacity in the ten priority wards through regular presence in community activities; excellent communication and networking skills; and active partnerships with existing organizations and networks.

The CHDO and WT programmes draw on the Community Insight Profiles in their activities, as demonstrated in the application of CIP criteria in scoring grant applications. In terms of grant allocation, the result has been the financial support of over 100 community organizations via 196 community health and wellbeing activities (WT and CIP combined), with £1 125 715 total funding allocated via an average grant of £5 743 per activity (£2 530 per CIP grant and £7 934 per WT grant). Yet, as analysis of CHDO and CCB community engagement demonstrates, financial data are only the most easily (quantitatively) measurable part of the programmes' activities, akin to the iceberg model of what is visible in public and community health.

Much research has outlined methods that help to quantitatively measure the effect and impact of preventative health programmes. UK health economists Stephen Martin, James Lomas, and Karl Claxton, for example, applied quality-adjusted life year (QALY) measurements to local public health budgets, with data suggesting that every additional year of good health achieved through public health intervention costs only £3 800, whereas NHS interventions with the same outcome cost £13 500.[36] Indeed, British research on health care and cost effectiveness notes how little is spent on prevention (recently estimated at 5% of the UK's National Health Service annual budget), even though it is widely recognized that preventative interventions can be more cost effective than curative treatment. Explanations for funding of curative or acute (hospitals, medical technology) rather than preventative health measures often focus on how items such as hospitals and medical technology are easily translated into the quantitative language of policy, as well how policy focuses on urgent points of health care (e.g. treatment waiting times or numbers of medical operations), rather than more nebulous concepts such as wellbeing or physical activity. Recent papers have thus called for identifying and classifying

[36] Martin, Lomas, and Claxton, 'Is an ounce of prevention worth a pound of cure? A cross-sectional study of the impact of English public health grant on mortality and morbidity' *BMJ Open* Oct 10 (2020): e036411.

preventative expenditure as its own category within UK government budgets as a way to highlight and secure investment in prevention through improved accountability.[37]

Demonstrating the quantitative effectiveness of preventative health programmes is likewise the aim of methodologies such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) or Social Cost-Benefit Analysis (SCBA), which apply social value methodologies to evaluate public health interventions. SCBA, for example, assigns monetary value to categories such as 'well-being'; SROI provides a framework in which value is itself quantified. Overall, such studies often note the difference between what are often termed hard clinical outcomes – mortality, morbidity, and hospital admission rates – and soft health outcomes – such as benefits to individuals, families, communities, and their environments.[38] Similar research has focused on complexity and social-systems analysis, observing the ability of small-scale interventions to either produce change in complex systems, or to create change through what can be described as 'ripple effects'.[39]

At the same time, research that outlines the value of what is loosely termed community social capital – the degree to which individuals are part of communities and local networks – to health outcomes has long been the basis of both health and social research. While definitions and measurements of social capital can vary, it is widely acknowledged that this approach has been a crucial and useful addition to understanding population health, as it recognizes that health is not simply a condition in individuals, but needs to be understood as part of social dynamics. As a result, most health outcome data is now analysed at group level and also comparatively, whether by demographics, geography, economy, ethnicity, gender, or culture. At the same time, population health is understood in relation to social infrastructure and community resilience.[40]

[37] E.g. Demos, *Counting What Matters* (2024).

[38] E.g. Ashton et al., 'The social value of investing in public health across the life course: a systematic scoping review' *BMC Public Health* 20:597 (2020); Hutchinson et al, 'Valuing the impact of health and social care programs using social return on investment analysis: how have academics advanced the methodology? A systematic review', *BMJ Open* 9:8 (2019): e029789.

[39] E.g. 'Ripple effects mapping: capturing the wider impacts of systems change efforts in public health' *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 22:72 (2022); Moore et al., 'From complex social interventions to interventions in complex social systems: Future directions and unresolved questions for intervention development and evaluation.' *Evaluation* 25:1 (2019), 23-45.

[40] Key works include Kawachi, Berman, 'Social Cohesion, Social Capital, and Health'; Rodgers et al, 'Social capital and physical health: an updated review of the literature for 2007-2018', *Social Science & Medicine* (2019); Robert Putnam et al., *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993); Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000); Szreter and Woolcock, 'Health by association? Social capital, social theory, and the political economy of public health' *International Epidemiological Association* (2004); Wilkinson, *Unhealthy Societies* (1996).

Research and experience thus demonstrate that investment in preventative health services and social infrastructure more broadly is substantially cost effective.[41] This is in part because responsive and acute medical care is more expensive than public health interventions, but also because public health interventions avoid so-called preventable demands on public services. Social prescribing is an example of an increasingly-widespread intervention that reduces demands on NHS services. But as a recent UK policy analysis of public services observes, to be effective, these preventative interventions 'need to be delivered by trusted local institutions, particularly those in the hardest to reach places which have the lowest levels of trust in the state.'[42] To build and maintain trust, relationships are crucial. Yet, as a recent report points out, 'Too often discussions of relationships are shrugged off in policy making circles as "fluffy" or "nice to have" side issues.' In reality, 'We cannot deliver more effective services, improve lives, generate better outcomes and save money through disparaging the importance of relationships.'[43]

Our evaluation builds on longstanding research that recognizes the social aspects of public health, and particularly the role of social relationships in achieving and maintaining successful public health interventions. As analyses of global and community health interventions reiterate, community health programmes work best when initiated via residents' own ambitions and wants, through collaborative partnerships, and in ways that can be maintained in the long-term. Such practices help to create trust, which is crucial in communities that consider themselves at variance with medical and political authorities, or are distrustful of wavering cycles of interventions – as found in the Community Insight Profiles of the ten priority wards. Simply providing or counting assets misses the necessary linkage between residents and infrastructure, as communities require trusted relationships with public services in order to make use of them.

As a result, our research found that while financial, political, and administrative support was necessarily important for the CHDO and WT programmes, their long-term effectiveness depended on the nature of the social relationships established through individual CHDO and CCBs. As Szreter and Woolcock observe, 'social capital is not a magic wand for improving society.' Instead, social capital:

> is a useful concept, which focuses our attention on an important set of resources, inhering in relationships, networks, associations, and norms, which have previously been accorded insufficient priority in the social sciences and health

[41] E.g. Frontier Economics, *The Impacts of Social Infrastructure Investment* (2001).
[42] Demos, *The Preventative State* (2023), p. 17; on social prescribing: NASP, *The Impact of Social Prescribing on Health Service Use and Costs* (2024).
[43] Demos, *The Preventative State* (2023), p. 20.

literature. This is probably partly because they are not easy to categorize, study and measure in their effects.

Evaluating social relationships therefore focuses on the quality of such relationships, rather than only on their quantity. More fundamentally, as the literature on social and cultural contexts of health points out, it is these relationships that allow and encourage individuals to access standard institutions of public health and medical care, as demonstrated in section 4.5. Without such social relationships, residents are not aware of health and wellbeing opportunities – including health screening and medical check-ups – and will likely remain indifferent, if not hostile, to the communication about such opportunities. Social relationships are particularly key in improving health and wellbeing in the ten priority wards, given that residents identify that there is availability of health resources – but note that the difficulty is access, both material and cultural. As Szreter and Woolcock add, 'Material assistance will almost certainly be necessary in most contexts; but equally important will be attention to the quality and quantity of relationships, which carry and make interpretable any such material or technological transfers.'[44] The quality of social relationships provided through the CHDO and WT programmes are therefore key foundations for the success of overarching health programmes such as NHS screening and medical provision.

Alongside a focus on these 'precious resources of human relationships, effort, and care,' our research also highlights that sustainability is crucial to the effectiveness of public health interventions. As the Community Insight Profiles note, and as organizers of the health and wellbeing activities also observe, a major challenge facing community engagement is the tendency to be distracted by novelty rather than investing in continuity. Our findings outline that both programmes contribute to sustainable community health and wellbeing. There are two reasons for this. First, CHDOs and CCBs are chosen for their experience of working with local networks, meaning that they begin their roles already invested in established community organizations – which also avoids the pitfalls of 'parachute science'. Second, their roles strongly emphasize networking and collaboration, including the sharing of resources and opportunities. The outcome is seen in the fact that the majority of funding is allocated to sustaining and maintaining organizations and activities (a minimum of 66%, n=130) rather than to new initiatives. This stands in contrast to standard practice that suggests that only the previous five years of research or activity be taken into consideration when evaluating community health initiatives and programmes.[45] We therefore recommend that health programmes take a longer-term approach to avoid the cycles of intervention that characterize 'parachute science',

[44] Szreter and Woolcock, 'Health by association' p. 663.
[45] E.g. Harris, *Evaluating Public and Community Health Programs* (2016) states that reviews should focus on publications from no more than the previous five to ten years.

which can lead to community indifference or even mistrust towards health initiatives. While policy-makers may have only short-term recall, communities have long-term memory.

We also encourage attention to community engagement among males, as preliminary research suggests lower male engagement with community activity than female. Given that men have lower life expectancy than women in all priority wards, and for social and cultural reasons are known to struggle with access to health and medical services, male participation in community health and wellbeing activities would be worth analysing as an indicator of broad community involvement. Approaches to community health and wellbeing should thus take account of gender norms, alongside other social and cultural factors.[46]

Our evaluation therefore recommends continued support for community health interventions that develop social relationships, as the WT and CHDO programmes do, as well as interventions that focus on sustainability in order to continue to build residents' trust as well as develop community capacity. This echoes widespread calls for investment in preventative and community health interventions that are place-based and that take account of social and cultural contexts to health. We observe that the CHDO and WT programmes reflect and build on the assets and strengths of the ten priority wards, and contribute to overall health and wellbeing goals of these communities through culturally-appropriate and place-based practices. We also recommend assessment that incorporates the quality – and not just quantity – of social relationships when outlining the effectiveness of community health programmes, and includes a long-term and contextual approach in framing interventions. This will help to highlight the benefit of sustainability over novelty, and the importance of place-based social relationships for health.

[46] See also Healthwatch Oxfordshire's 'Hearing from men in Oxfordshire' 2025 research report.

Appendix 6

Newton Europe – Local Government Reorganisation, Impact on people services (July 2025)

Local Government Reorganisation: Impact on people services

Full report for Oxfordshire County Council

Issued: 10 July, 2025

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Local Government Reorganisation: Impact on people services

INTRODUCTION

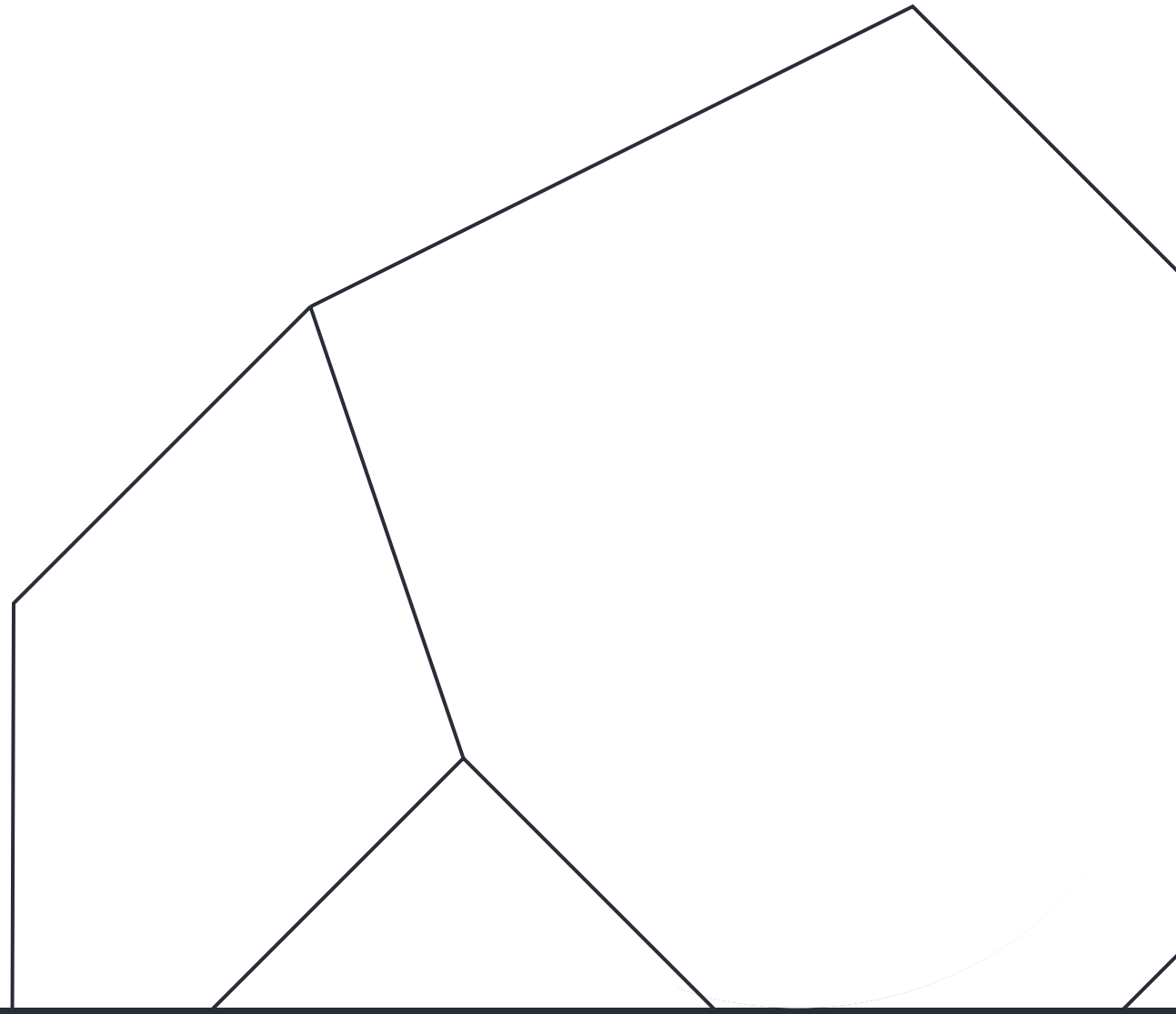
This report contains the full output of both Phase 1 and 2 of analysis of the impact of LGR on people services in Oxfordshire. The work has considered the impact on Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, Education services, and Housing and Homelessness as local authorities are reorganised and responsibility of care changes across new geographical footprints within the county.

For each proposed formation, the expected demand and/or caseload for key people services within the county has been calculated across the options proposed by the authority. This includes a view for how demand and cost of service delivery split in 2025 and how these may change over the period until 2040.

The analysis contained in this report is based on data shared with Newton from the county and from national data returns.

The core methodology used, and assumptions made to undertake this analysis are included in the appendix.

This report contains the results of Newton's analysis, based on the data that has been provided, or otherwise made available to us, and no information contained within it should be treated as a recommendation to any Council or other authority. Responsibility for all business decisions including decisions on improvement actions (and for the acts themselves) rests solely with the Council or other authority making such decision.



Purpose of this report

THIS REPORT IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE COMPARISONS BETWEEN SCEANRIOS

This model has been developed to allow the analysis to be completed across multiple councils at pace as well as aggregate results to inform a national report. Therefore, whilst this report provides detailed analysis allowing comparisons between scenarios, it has limitations and should not be considered in isolation.

What this report is...	What this report is not...
✓ A way to compare different scenarios and proposed unitary authorities based on expected demand and cost figures	✗ A detailed financial model designed to predict exact spend or demand numbers
✓ A way to highlight the impact of LGR on people-based services and the key themes that are important for your local area	✗ A detailed staffing model that accounts for all expected roles in new unitary authorities
✓ A general model that can be applied to multiple councils that will show directionally correct forecasts	✗ A recommendation on the best scenario
✓ Designed to allow high level aggregated insight to be used in a national report with the CCN	

This report covers the agreed scope discussed with CCN and in steering groups. This does not consider all possible factors for LGR and should therefore not be treated in isolation. For example, the impact of public health, social housing or additional staffing costs from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, has not been modelled.

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People Based Services

THIS REPORT IS FOCUSSED ON THE IMPACT OF LGR ON PEOPLE-BASED SERVICES

Adult Social Care

Adult Social Care is the support provided to help adults of all ages most commonly with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, frailty, mental illnesses, or who suffer from substance misuse. Local authorities have a legal duty under the Care Act 2014 to assess and meet eligible needs, provide safeguarding, and shape the local care market. The aim is to promote independence, dignity, and wellbeing, enabling people to live as safely and independently as possible in their own communities, with the people and things that matter to them most.

In this report Adult Social Care has been split by age group and refers to Working Age Adult (18-64) and Older Adult (65+).

This report focusses on adults who are receiving long term care. These can be supported through a variety of provisions. For this analysis the report has focussed on:

- **Nursing Care**: Specialised nursing support provided in a care home.
- **Residential Care**: Support provided in a care home.
- **Supported Living**: Supporting individuals either in their own homes or shared housing.
- **Domiciliary Care**: Supporting individuals in their own home with personal care and household tasks.
- **Other**: Care that does not fall into the above categories.

Children's Social Care

Children's Social Care supports children, young people and families who need additional help to protect children and young people from harm. Its main aim is to keep families together, but when this isn't possible, the system provides an alternative home to children and young people. The Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children's Services in local authorities are the key points of professional and political accountability, but the relevant Acts of Parliament also place safeguarding duties on a range of organisations and individuals (including ICBs, police and education providers).

Children can be supported through a variety of measures. This report focuses on these key services:

- **Children in Care**: The council has parental responsibility of the child and must place the chid in a safe setting.
- **Child Protection Plan**: Compulsory plan when a specific risk to a child is identified.
- **Child in Need Plan**: A non-statutory plan that recognises a need that a child has.
- **Early help:** Non-statutory support to families and children considered to be vulnerable and at risk.

There is a significant reform agenda underway that will impact the nature of services in Children's Social Care, with the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill progressing through Parliament at present.

Services For Children With SEND

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities refers to a child or young person who has a learning difficulty and/or disability that means they need special health and education support.

This report focuses on young people who are supported by an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This is a legal document outlining the educational, health, and social care needs of a child or young person with special educational needs or disabilities, aged 0 to 25. Children and young people with EHCPs can be supported in a variety of settings. For this analysis the report has focussed on:

- **Mainstream**: Children and young people supported in mainstream schools.
- **Maintained Special Schools** (MSS): Children and young people supported in local authority owned special schools.
- **Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools** (INMSS): Children and young people supported in independent non-local authority owned special schools.
- **Other:** EHCPs that do not fall into the above categories.

This report doesn't include statutory SEN support which should be provided by mainstream schools with less oversight from the LA.

Across all services for residents that need additional support there are increasing costs that are putting increased pressure on councils to deliver these services, against a backdrop of increasingly constrained finances. This report focuses on the impact LGR may have on these services.

Interpreting the report

THIS HIGHLIGHTS THE KEY TERMINOLOGY USED THROUGHOUT THIS REPORT

Scenarios

Scenarios have been provided by councils through the data returns.

- **Unitary authorities:** The new unitary authorities that have been proposed by councils for each scenario. These unitary authorities are made up of current Districts and/or Middle Super Output Areas (MSOAs).
- **Baseline:** The current boundaries of the council as well as any neighbouring unitary authorities that are included as part of any proposed scenarios.

Projections

This analysis focusses on the impact of LGR on 'current demand' (2025) as well as future demand (2030 and 2040).

- **Current demand:** Current demand refers to what would happen to demand and cost on the day that LGR takes effect - assumed to be in 2025. This has been done taking the data provided and projecting to 2025. This refers to the initial demand and costs expected to be distributed to each unitary authorities at this point.
- **Future demand:** Demand and cost has been projected out to 2030 and 2040 to illustrate how this may change over time. This is to show the different growth rates and highlight the sustainability of proposed unitary authorities. For detailed methodology, please see the appendix.

People-based services terminology

Where appropriate acronyms and terminology on specific slides has been called out.

- **Supported person:** This refers to someone who is currently receiving support from the council. Adult Social Care: an individual receiving long term support. Children's Social Care: Children in Care (CiC) as well as young people on a Child Protection Plan, Child in Need plan or receiving an early help intervention, for SEND this is a young person with an EHCP.
- **Prevalence:** The amount of the population that is supported by the council, represented as number per 10,000 of the relevant population (e.g. working age adults).
- **Ordinary residence:** Where current residing address (e.g. a residential care home) is different to the originating address of future demand (i.e. the supported person's initial residence prior to social care support) and demand therefore re-balances over time due to ordinary residence rules.
- **Service spend:** Total spend produced by the model for each directorate. This includes "provision spend" which refers to the total spend of delivering social care and "staffing spend" which refers to the staffing spend that is solely attributable to delivering social care.

Key Assumptions

THIS OUTLINES THE KEY ASSUMPTIONS THAT HAVE GONE INTO THIS INITIAL ANALYSIS

Key assumptions have been made to enable this analysis to be performed at scale and pace. The key caveats and assumptions have been listed below and should be considered when drawing insight from the data. For detailed methodology, please see the appendix.

Neighbouring unitary authorities:
Where neighbouring unitary authorities have been included in scenarios, but no data provided, it has been assumed that the prevalence and unit cost in each provision will match the average for the rest of the county. Therefore, if you expect a neighbouring unitary authority to show very different trends this will not be captured.
Please note, if data has been provided for neighbouring unitary authorities this has been included.

Data sources:
The analysis in this report has been compiled using each council's data returns along with nationally available data where appropriate (e.g. ONS population estimates and projections).

Data caveats:
Where data has not been submitted to complete key analysis this has been highlighted in the relevant sections.

All analysis has been completed using data submissions returned by authorities and nationally available returns. If there are anomalies or inaccuracies, please contact Newton who will work with each authority to reconcile.

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Section 1: Executive summary and high-level overview

This section provides a high-level summary of the outputs produced as part of Newton analysis on the impact on people services as a result of LGR.

Further detail is available in the full report.

Overview: Geographies of New Unitary Authorities

THE BELOW TABLE LAYS OUT THE DISTRICTS INCLUDED IN EACH OF THE NEW UNITARY AUTHORITY SCENARIOS

Scenario	Proposed Unitary	Districts included
Baseline	Oxfordshire	Oxfordshire current boundaries
	West Berkshire	West Berkshire current boundaries
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	Oxford City, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse
Scenario 2	North	Oxford City, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire
	South	South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire
Scenario 3	Oxford	Oxford City
	Cherwell & West Oxon.	Cherwell, West Oxfordshire
	South	South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire

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Executive Summary: Terminology

WE HAVE OUTLINED THE KEY INSIGHT BY SCENARIO

The following slides outline how the demand and spend will split in each of the proposed unitary authorities by scenario, along with a comparison of the total cost of each scenario. We have also included the variation between each proposed unitary authority for the scenario in question and compared this to the baseline position.

The definitions of the key terminology used in these summaries is outlined below:

- **Total predicted spend per scenario:** This shows the combined spend per scenario predicted by the model for people-based services. This includes both placement costs (e.g. Residential Care beds or EHCP provision) and staffing costs for staff working directly on supporting service users, such as social workers, (where this has been provided). Staffing costs for other teams, such as IT or legal teams, are not included as part of this work. Please note that this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a detailed financial forecast.
- **Spend per resident:** This is the spend per resident per year where spend is total service and staffing spend (where this has been provided) and number of residents is the total population in each of the proposed unitary authorities.
- **Population supported by people-based services:** The population supported by people-based services predicted by the model refers to Adult Social Care (ASC): long term support, Children's Social Care (CSC): Children in Care (CiC), Child Protection Plans (CPP), Child in Need (CiN) plans or receiving an early help intervention, SEND: child or young person supported by an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
    - The **total demand** is the total of those supported by people-based services.
    - The **demand variation** is the variation in the percentage of the population supported by people-based services.
    - The **demand growth** is the growth in total number of people supported by people-based services from 2025-2040.
- **Baseline:** The values associated with the baseline scenario, including current county council and any neighbouring unitary authorities.

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Executive Summary: Scenario 1

KEY INSIGHTS FOR EACH SCENARIO

Scenario 1: Single County Unitary (**Oxfordshire**)

This scenario represents keeping Oxfordshire's current boundaries, as a single county unitary.

Total predicted spend for the scenario:

£539.9m in 2025 and £1037.9m in 2040.

Variation between proposed unitary authorities within scenario:

- Variation cannot be compared as this is a one unitary scenario

Oxfordshire – *2025*

Districts included: Current Oxfordshire boundaries
Total population: 725.7k
Age demographics: % population 65+ 18.2%, % population U18 20.3%
IMD score: 11.06
Total spend predicted by the model: £539.9m
Total demand: 21.5k (7.5k ASC, 5.4k CSC, 8.6k SEND)

Comparison to baseline scenario

- Spend per resident: £744 per resident per year at day 1, this is the highest of proposed unitary authorities, 0.16% lower than baseline scenario (which includes West Berkshire).
- Demand for people-based services: 2.97% of population supported by people-based services. This is an increase of 1.01% compared to the baseline with West Berkshire.
- Growth in demand: 17.3% growth in demand for people-based services from 2025 to 2040. This is a decrease of 5.8% to the baseline.

IMD score (Index of Multiple Deprivation): Official measure of relative deprivation in England. A lower score indicates a less deprived area.

Executive Summary: Scenario 2

KEY INSIGHTS FOR EACH SCENARIO

Scenario 2: 2 Unitary Authorities (North / South)

This scenario sits in the middle in terms of total predicted spend of all proposed scenarios. This scenario contains the second highest spend per resident of the proposed authorities in the North, as well as the second lowest spend per resident in the South.

Total predicted spend for the scenario:

£660.9m in 2025 and £1272.2m in 2040. This is 0.16% higher than baseline position (an increase of £1.1m in 2025 and an increase of £2.9m in 2040).

Variation between proposed unitary authorities within scenario:

- Spend per resident: Second highest variation in spend per resident of all scenarios, varying by 4.28% in 2025. In 2040 this rises to 9.04%.
- Demand variation: Second lowest variation in percentage of population supported by people-based services in 2025, varying by 0.52% (0.02 percentage points).
- Demand growth: Second lowest variation in growth of demand, varying by 18.3% (3.3 percentage points).

North – *2025*

Districts included: Oxford City, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire
Total population: 429.6k
Age demographics: % population 65+ 16.8%, % population U18 19.7%
IMD score: 13.83
Total spend predicted by the model: £313.5m
Total demand: 12.6k (4.4k ASC, 3.4k CSC, 4.8k SEND)

Comparison to baseline scenario

- Spend per resident: £730 per resident per year in 2025, this is a decrease of 2.00% to the baseline.
- Demand for people-based services: 2.93% of population supported by people-based services. This is a decrease of 0.27% to current baseline demand.
- Growth in demand: 16.6% growth in demand for people-based services from 2025 to 2040. This is 9.2% lower than the baseline.

South – *2025*

Districts included: South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire
Total population: 456.1k
Age demographics: % population 65+ 20.2%, % population U18 21.3%
IMD score: 21.67
Total spend predicted by the model: £347.3m
Total demand: 13.4k (4.8k ASC, 3.3k CSC, 5.4k SEND)

Comparison to baseline scenario

- Spend per resident: £762 per resident per year in 2025, this is an increase of 2.20% to the baseline.
- Demand for people-based services: 2.95% of population supported by people-based services. This is an increase of 0.25% to the baseline demand.
- Growth in demand: 19.9% growth in demand for people-based services from 2025 to 2040. This is 8.6% lower than the baseline.

IMD score (Index of Multiple Deprivation): Official measure of relative deprivation in England. A lower score indicates a less deprived area.

Executive Summary: Scenario 3

KEY INSIGHTS FOR EACH SCENARIO

Scenario 3: 3 Unitary Authorities (Cherwell & West Oxon / Oxford / South)

This scenario has the highest total predicted spend of all proposed scenarios. This scenario also has the highest variation in spend per resident across all scenarios, with Cherwell & West Oxon having the highest spend per resident of all proposed authorities. This scenario also has the highest variation of percentage of population supported, and the highest variation in demand growth, with Cherwell & West Oxon also facing the highest proportion supported of the proposed authorities (inc. baseline authorities).

Total predicted spend for the scenario:

£666.9m in 2025 and £1282.0 in 2040. This is 1.07% higher than baseline position (an increase of £7.1m in 2025 and £12.7m in 2040).

Variation between proposed unitary authorities within scenario:

- Spend per resident: Highest variation in spend per resident of all scenarios, varying by 17.96% in 2025. In 2040 this decreases sightly to 17.34%
- Demand variation: Highest variation in percentage of population supported by people-based services in 2025, varying by 31.03% (0.76 percentage points).
- Demand growth: Highest variation in growth of demand, varying by 18.3% (5.7 percentage points).

Cherwell & West Oxon – *2025*

Districts included: Cherwell, West Oxfordshire
Total population: 275.1k
Age demographics: % population 65+ 19.4%, % population U18 20.7%
IMD score: 12.06
Total spend predicted by the model: £216.6m
Total demand: 8.8k (3.1k ASC, 2.2k CSC, 3.5k SEND)

Comparison to baseline scenario

- Spend per resident: £787 per resident per year in 2025, this is 5.65% higher than baseline. This is the highest spend per resident of all proposed unitaries in all scenarios.
- Demand for people-based services: 3.20% of population supported by people-based services. This is an increase of 9.0% relative to baseline.
- Growth in demand: 14.9% growth in demand for people-based services from 2025 to 2040. This is a decrease of 18.4% relative to the baseline.

Oxford – *2025*

Districts included: Oxford City
Total population: 154.2k
Age demographics: % population 65+ 12.0%, % population U18 17.8%
IMD score: 16.99
Total spend predicted by the model: £102.9m
Total demand: 3.8k (1.3k ASC, 1.2k CSC, 1.3k SEND)

Comparison to baseline scenario

- Spend per resident: £667 per resident per year in 2025, this is a decrease of 10.44% to the baseline.
- Demand for people-based services: 2.45% of population supported by people-based services. This is 16.81% below the baseline scenario. This is the lowest demand across all proposed unitaries in all scenarios.
- Growth in demand: 20.6% growth in demand for people-based services from 2025 to 2040. This is an increase of 12.5% to baseline.

South – *2025*

Districts included: South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Berkshire
Total population: 456.1k
Age demographics: % population 65+ 20.2%, % population U18 21.3%
IMD score: 21.67
Total spend predicted by the model: £347.3m
Total demand: 13.4k (4.8k ASC, 3.3k CSC, 5.4k SEND)

Comparison to baseline scenario

- Spend per resident: £762 per resident per year in 2025, this is an increase of 2.20% to the baseline.
- Demand for people-based services: 2.95% of population supported by people-based services. This is an increase of 0.25% to the baseline demand.
- Growth in demand: 19.9% growth in demand for people-based services from 2025 to 2040. This is 8.6% lower than the baseline.

IMD score (Index of Multiple Deprivation): Official measure of relative deprivation in England. A lower score indicates a less deprived area.

Overview: Demographics of New Unitary Authorities

4 Scenarios have been modelled and compared to the current set up (baseline)

This analysis has considered the impact of LGR on people services by considering 4 proposed unitary formations and comparing this to the baseline position. These are summarised below.

Baseline – Oxfordshire and West Berkshire

Oxfordshire (Scenario 1): Current boundaries
- Total population: 726k
- % population 65+: 18.2%
- % population U18: 20.3%
- ICB boundaries: 2

West Berkshire: Current boundaries
- Total population: 160k
- % population 65+: 19.9%
- % population U18: 21.5%
- ICB boundaries: 1

Scenario 2 – North / South

North:
- Total population: 430k
- % population 65+: 16.8%
- % population U18: 19.7%
- ICB boundaries: 1

South:
- Total population: 456k
- % population 65+: 20.2%
- % population U18: 21.3%
- ICB boundaries: 2

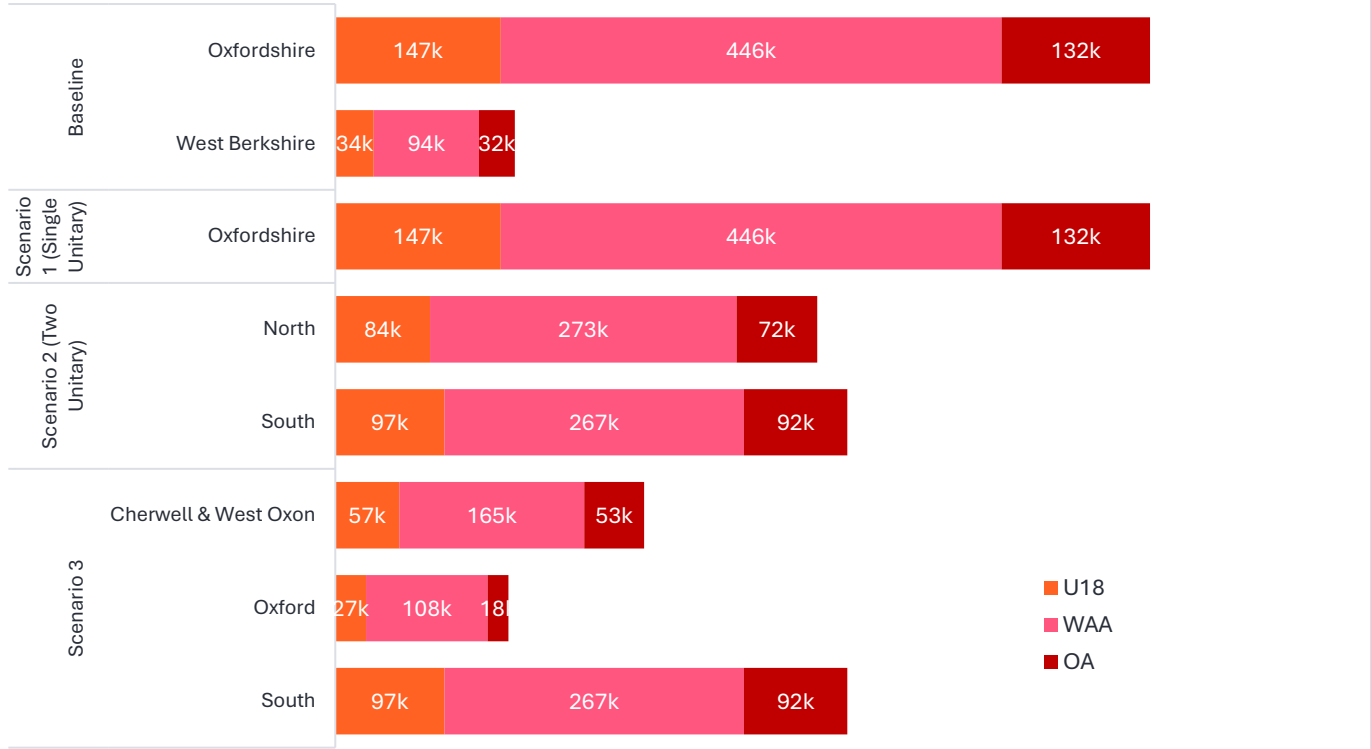
Scenario 3 – Three Unitary

Cherwell & West Oxon:
- Total population: 275k
- % population 65+: 19.4%
- % population U18: 20.7%
- ICB boundaries: 1

Oxford:
- Total population: 154k
- % population 65+: 12.0%
- % population U18: 17.8%
- ICB boundaries: 1

South:
- Total population: 456k
- % population 65+: 20.2%
- % population U18: 21.3%
- ICB boundaries: 2

Population distribution across proposed authorities



All proposed unitaries are within NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board. Those that cross 2 boundaries are also part of NHS Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire Integrated Care Board.

WAA: Working Age Adult, 18 - 64
OA: Older Adult, 65+

Overview: Demand

DEMAND FOR SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION SERVICES IS EXPECTED TO GROW

This analysis has modelled the demand for Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care and Education services. A detailed breakdown by setting is included later in this report.

The % of the Total Population supported by people services refers to Adult Social Care: long term support, Children's Social Care: Children in Care, Child Protection Plans, Child in Need plans or receiving an early help intervention, SEND: child or young person supported by an Education, Health and Care Plan. This analysis shows the variation in both 2025 demand and the future growth in demand. This will support understanding if certain scenarios would create unitary authorities that have high variation in demand in 2025. The projected view to 2040 also gives insight to any sustainability challenge for unitary authorities that are seeing a disproportionate growth in the future demand levels.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	% Total Population supported by people services	% Change in number of residents supported by people services (2025-2040)	% change ASC (2025 – 2040)	% change CSC (2025 – 2040)	% change SEND (2025 – 2040)	Number of residents supported by people services
Baseline	Oxfordshire	2.97%	17%	15%	-1%	31%	7.5k 5.4k 8.6k
	West Berkshire	2.80%	23%	10%	-8%	64%	1.7k 1.2k 1.5k
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	2.97%	17%	15%	-1%	31%	4.4k 3.4k 4.8k
Scenario 2	North	2.93%	17%	12%	-1%	33%	4.8k 3.3k 5.4k
	South	2.95%	20%	16%	-4%	38%	7.5k 5.4k 8.6k
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	3.20%	15%	12%	-2%	28%	3.1k 2.2k 3.5k
	Oxford	2.45%	21%	12%	1%	46%	1.3k 1.2k 1.3k
	South	2.95%	20%	16%	-4%	38%	4.8k 3.3k 5.4k

ASC
CSC
SEND

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate.

Overview: Spend

SPEND ON PEOPLES SERVICES BY PROPOSED UNITARY FORMATION

This analysis has considered the impact of LGR on the cost of delivering Adult & Children's Social Care services alongside the cost of SEND support. Note this is a general model to allow comparison between authorities and is not a financial forecast.

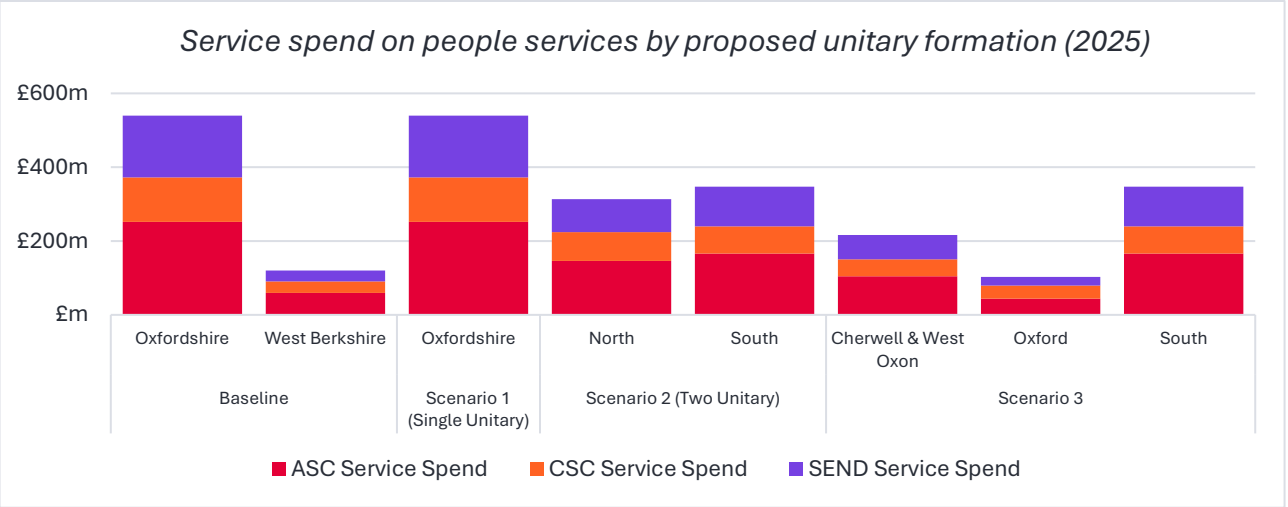
Cost values presented herein include both placement costs (e.g. Residential Care beds or EHCP provision) and staffing costs for staff working directly on supporting service users, such as social workers, (where this has been provided). Staffing costs for other teams, such as IT or legal teams, are not included.

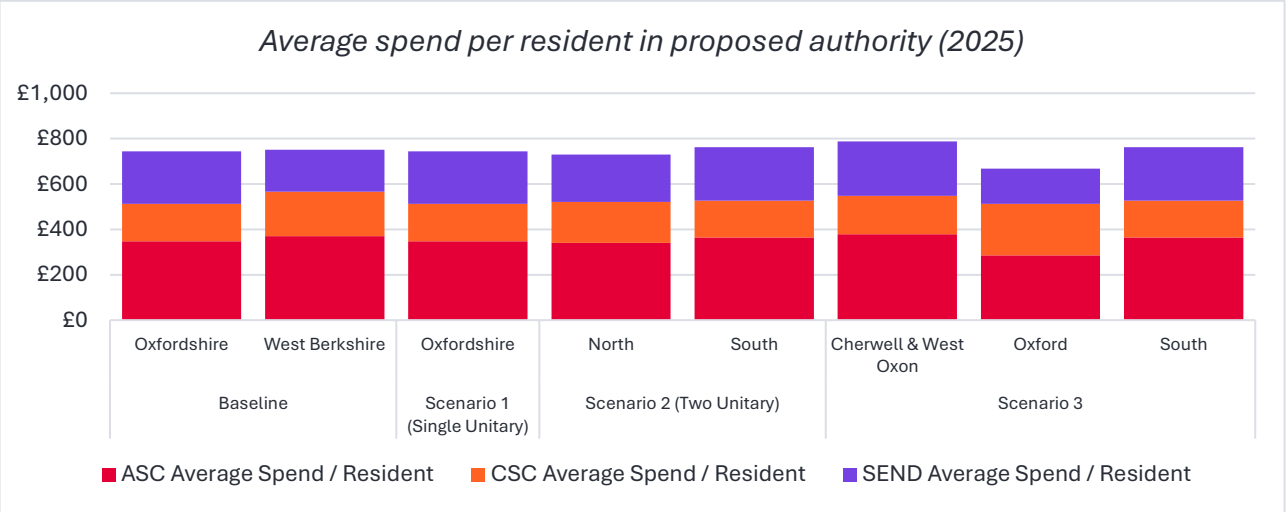
All analysis is a combination of local authority data returns supplied for the purposes of this research and national reporting.

In general, spend aligns with spread of demand across the county. This is because there is greater variation in demand than unit cost.

The average spend per resident shows the total spend per resident of the total population within the authority split by each directorate. Areas which have a higher total spend per resident than baseline may cause increased cost pressures when total spend is compared to expected funding.

Both the total spend per scenario and spend per resident has been broken down further and provided in the following pages. This page does not include spend on Home to School Transport or Housing.





Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Distorted demography adjustments.

Overview: Spend

SPEND PER PROPOSED SCENARIO

The table below shows the total cost per scenario predicted by the model for people-based services. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes. This page does not include spend on Home to School Transport or Housing.

In general, we see an increase in combined service cost for scenarios with more authorities, driven by additional fixed management costs within the proposed scenario, as each proposed authority requires its own management team. Additionally, the model applies a step-up factor to unit cost that takes into account median income, deprivation and total population; this means that if other factors remain constant, an increase in unit costs for smaller authorities is forecasted*.

Note, the model only accounts for the additional uplift in staffing costs for delivery teams and we would expect an additional increase from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, that have not been modelled in this analysis.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	**Total cost of service for scenario 2025**	ASC cost of service for scenario 2025	CSC cost of service for scenario 2025	SEND cost of service for scenario 2025	**Total cost of service for scenario 2040**	ASC cost of service for scenario 2040	CSC cost of service for scenario 2040	SEND cost of service for scenario 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire West Berkshire	**£659.8m**	£311.2m	£151.6m	£197.0m	**£1269.3m**	£574.8m	£241.5m	£453.0m
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	**£539.9m**	£252.1m	£120.2m	£167.5m	**£1037.9m**	£469.8m	£193.9m	£374.2m
Scenario 2	North South	**£660.9m**	£312.3m	£151.6m	£197.0m	**£1272.2m**	£577.7m	£241.5m	£453.0m
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon Oxford South	**£666.9m**	£314.4m	£155.5m	£197.0m	**£1282.0m**	£581.2m	£247.8m	£453.0m

** See Appendix I for additional detail.*

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Overview: Spend
SPEND PER RESIDENT

The table below shows the spend per resident per year for each of the proposed unitary authorities as well as breaking this down into each directorate. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes. Here spend is total service and staffing spend (where this has been provided) and number of residents is the total population in each of the proposed unitary authorities. This page does not include spend on Home to School Transport or Housing.

This analysis demonstrates where there are scenarios that have an increased spend per resident both in the 2025 scenario and in 2040, providing the detail behind the high-level insights into variation between proposed unitary authorities provided in the preceding summaries of each scenario.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	**Total spend per resident 2025**	ASC spend per resident 2025	CSC spend per resident 2025	SEND spend per resident 2025	**Total spend per resident 2040**	ASC spend per resident 2040	CSC spend per resident 2040	SEND spend per resident 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£744	£347	£166	£231	£1,319	£597	£246	£475
	West Berkshire	£751	£370	£196	£184	£1,415	£642	£291	£482
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£744	£347	£166	£231	£1,319	£597	£246	£475
Scenario 2	North	£730	£340	£181	£209	£1,279	£570	£272	£437
	South	£762	£364	£162	£235	£1,395	£644	£237	£514
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£787	£379	£169	£239	£1,362	£630	£250	£483
	Oxford	£667	£285	£228	£154	£1,188	£484	£349	£356
	South	£762	£364	£162	£235	£1,395	£644	£237	£514

Section 2a: Adult Social Care

The scope of this section is to provide insight into the likely impacts of each proposed scenario on Adult Social Care, covering demand, cost and quality over the next 15 years.

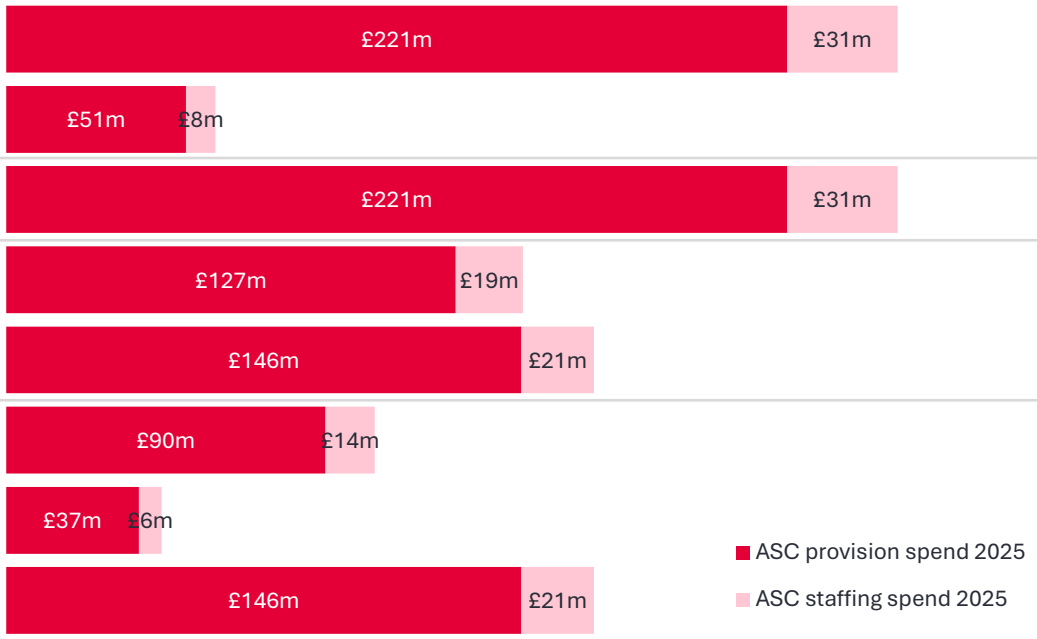
Adult Social Care

SERVICE COST VARIATION AND FORECASTS

This analysis has considered the variation in the cost of delivering care between each of the proposed unitary formations. This cost includes both the cost of the provision of care, in addition to the authority staffing cost associated with delivering ASC support (where this data has been provided). Staffing costs resulting from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, that have not been modelled in this analysis. Cost growth includes both the expected impact of increased demand, increased unit cost and wage increases. Spend per resident per year compares the cost for this service to total number of residents in the new authority. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes.

This will support understanding if certain scenarios create variation in spend per resident both in 2025 and the future, showing where there are unitary authorities with a higher spend per resident to the baseline scenario as well as unitary authorities that have high cost growth in the future. Growth in cost is driven by inflation, the different growth rates in demand across constituent areas within proposed authorities, and effect of ordinary residence.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Spend per resident 2025	Spend per resident 2040	% growth in spend (2025-2040)
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£347	£597	86%
	West Berkshire	£370	£642	78%
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£347	£597	86%
Scenario 2	North	£340	£570	81%
	South	£364	£644	89%
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£379	£630	80%
	Oxford	£285	£484	83%
	South	£364	£644	89%



Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council provided cost data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Adult Social Care: Older Adult population

POPULATION VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The existing Older Adult (over 65) population is shown across the districts in the geography. The below table shows the expected growth rate for Older Adult in each of the districts.

This analysis shows the underlying population trends that drive the change in demand for each of the new unitary authorities in the future.

District	65+ population by year			Percentage growth in 65+ from 2025-2040	Average percentage of Authority 65+	Annual growth rate of 65+ population
	2025	2030	2040			
Cherwell	28.0k	30.7k	33.0k	18%	19%	1.1%
Oxford	18.5k	20.4k	21.9k	19%	13%	1.1%
South Oxfordshire	30.5k	33.3k	35.5k	16%	22%	1.0%
Vale of White Horse	29.8k	33.6k	36.9k	24%	21%	1.4%
West Berkshire	31.8k	34.1k	35.8k	13%	21%	0.8%
West Oxfordshire	25.5k	28.3k	30.7k	20%	23%	1.2%

Average growth rate

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Adult Social Care: Older Adult demand

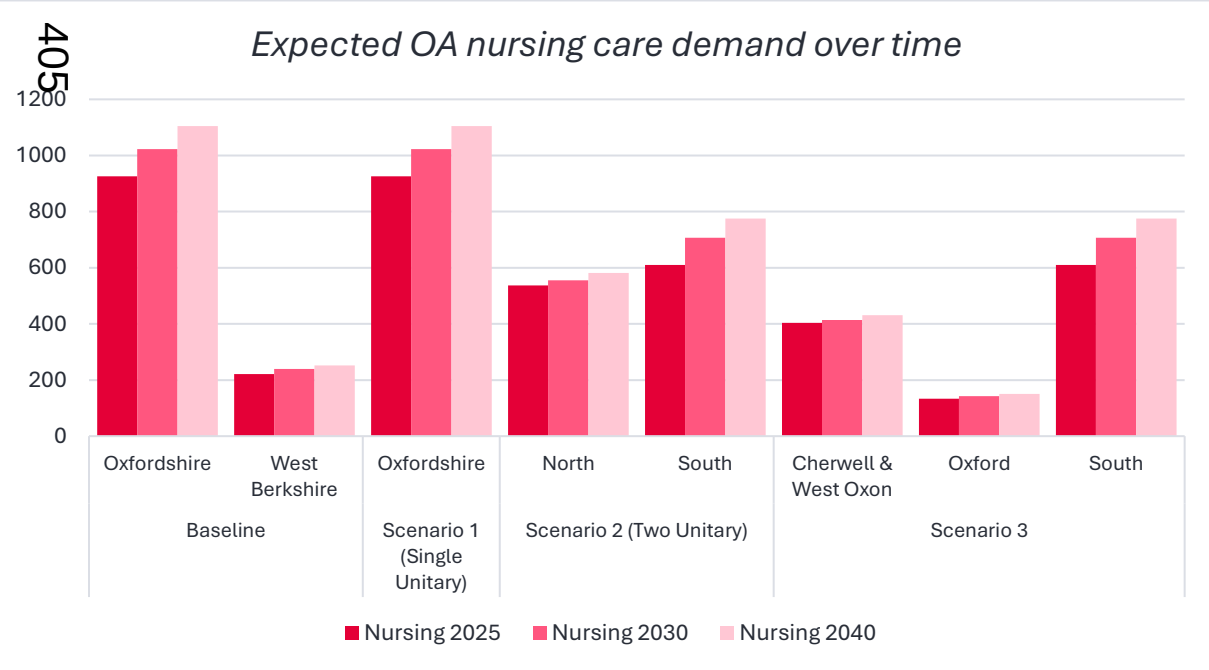
NURSING CARE DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The following slides show the expected demand for Older Adult in 2025, 2030 and 2040. The expected demand is driven by population forecasts in each new unitary as well as the effect of ordinary residence on the prevalence in each new unitary.

The graph on the left shows total demand in 2025, 2030 and 2040. In general, this is proportional to population in the new unitary authorities. This analysis will show the expected growth in each unitary and identify areas that are expected to see high growth.

The table to the right of each graph shows the prevalence per 10,000 Older Adults. Changes to prevalence over time will reflect where current residing address is different to the originating address of future demand and demand therefore re-balances over time due to ordinary residence rules. Therefore, some areas will have a high prevalence in 2025 which then decreases by 2040. Other areas have a low prevalence in 2025 with prevalence increasing by 2040 or no change to prevalence.

For Domiciliary Care and Other demand there is no impact of ordinary residence, therefore prevalence remains consistent.



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Nursing care Prevalence 2025	Nursing care Prevalence 2030	Nursing care Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	70	70	70
	West Berkshire	70	70	70
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	70	70	70
Scenario 2	North	75	70	68
	South	66	70	72
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	75	70	68
	Oxford	72	70	69
	South	66	70	72

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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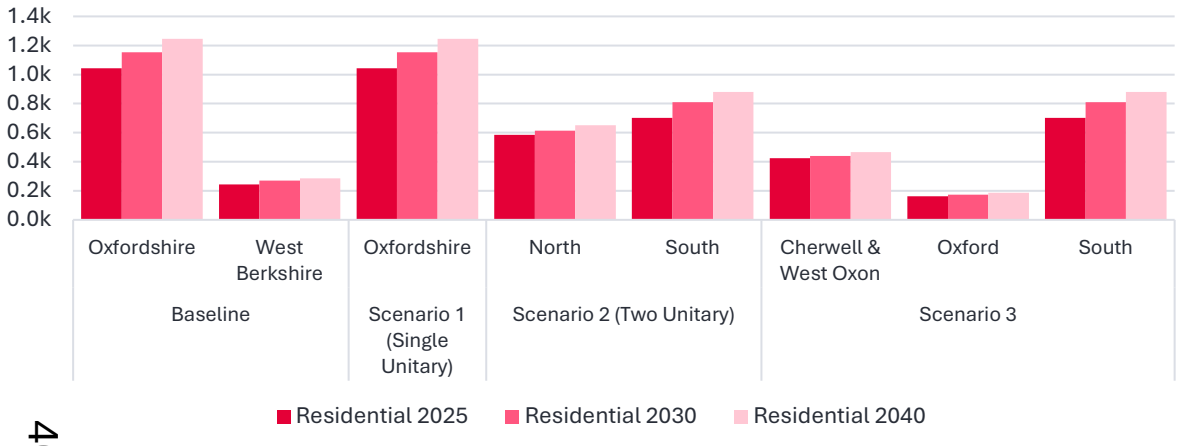
Prevalence is shown per 10k older adults (65+).

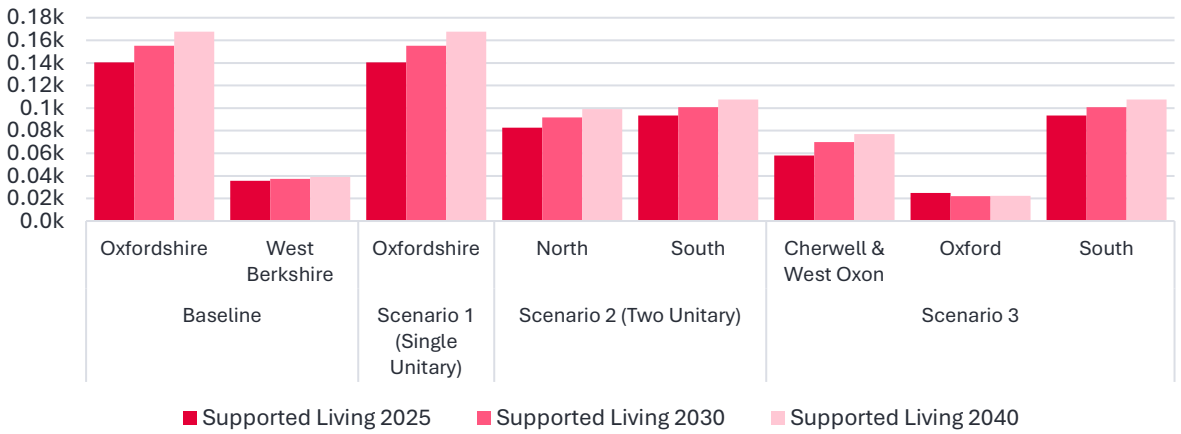
Adult Social Care: Older Adult demand

RESIDENTIAL CARE AND SUPPORTED LIVING DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

Expected OA residential care demand over time



Expected OA supported living demand over time



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Residential care Prevalence 2025	Residential care Prevalence 2030	Residential care Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	79	79	79
	West Berkshire	77	79	80
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	79	79	79
Scenario 2	North	81	77	76
	South	76	80	81
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	79	74	73
	Oxford	88	85	85
	South	76	80	81

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Supported Living Prevalence 2025	Supported Living Prevalence 2030	Supported Living Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	11	11	11
	West Berkshire	11	11	11
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	11	11	11
Scenario 2	North	12	12	12
	South	10	10	10
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	11	12	12
	Oxford	13	11	10
	South	10	10	10

Prevalence is shown per 10k older adults (65+).

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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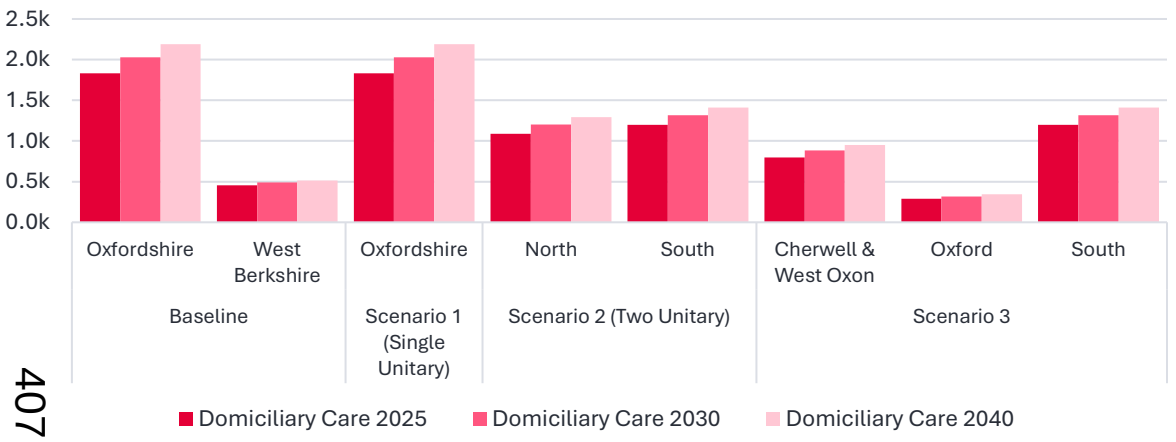
Adult Social Care: Older Adult demand

DOMICILIARY CARE AND OTHER DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

Expected OA domiciliary care demand over time



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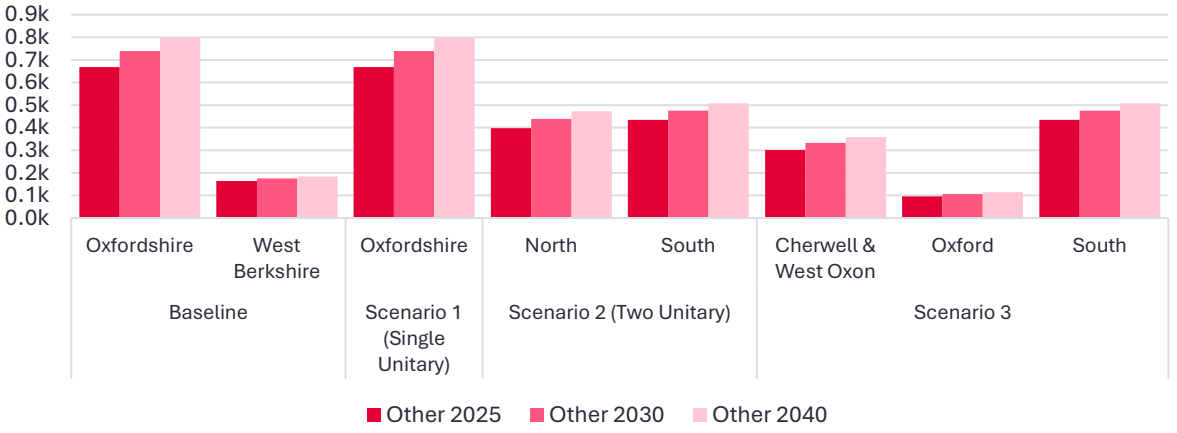
Scenario	Proposed Authority	Domiciliary Care Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	139
	West Berkshire	144
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	139
Scenario 2	North	151
	South	130
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	150
	Oxford	157
	South	130

Expected OA other demand over time



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Other Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	51
	West Berkshire	51
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	51
Scenario 2	North	55
	South	47
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	56
	Oxford	52
	South	47

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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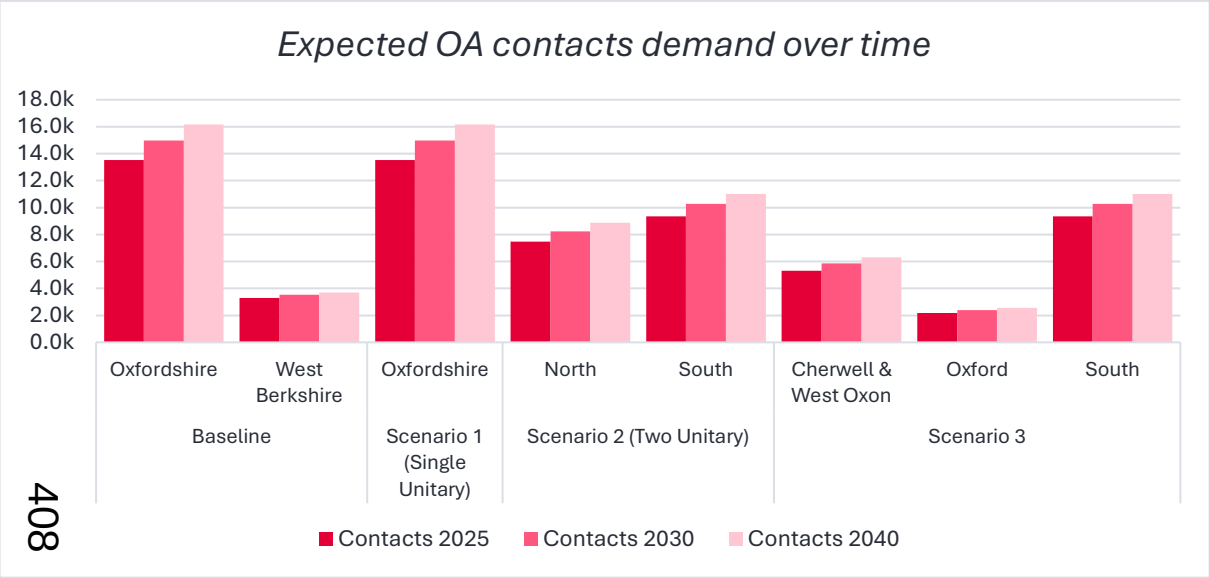
For Domiciliary Care and Other demand there is no impact of ordinary residence, therefore prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k older adults (65+).

Adult Social Care: Older Adult demand

CONTACTS DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Contacts Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	1024
	West Berkshire	1037
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	1024
Scenario 2	North	1039
	South	1017
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	992
	Oxford	1173
	South	1017

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

For contacts there is no impact of ordinary residence, therefore prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k older adults (65+).

Adult Social Care: Working Age Adult population

POPULATION VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The existing Working Age Adult (18-65) population is shown across the districts in the geography. The below table shows the expected growth rate for Working Age Adult in each of the districts.

This analysis shows the underlying population trends that drive the change in demand for each of the new unitary authorities in the future.

District	WAA population by year			Percentage growth in WAA from 2025-2040	Average percentage of Authority WAA	Annual growth rate of WAA population
	2025	2030	2040			
Cherwell	97.0k	100.6k	104.2k	7%	61%	0.5%
Oxford	108.3k	112.7k	116.9k	8%	70%	0.5%
South Oxfordshire	85.8k	88.5k	91.2k	6%	59%	0.4%
Vale of White Horse	87.3k	92.9k	98.5k	13%	58%	0.8%
West Berkshire	93.7k	94.9k	96.2k	3%	59%	0.2%
West Oxfordshire	67.6k	70.9k	74.3k	10%	58%	0.6%

Average growth rate

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Adult Social Care: Working Age Adult demand

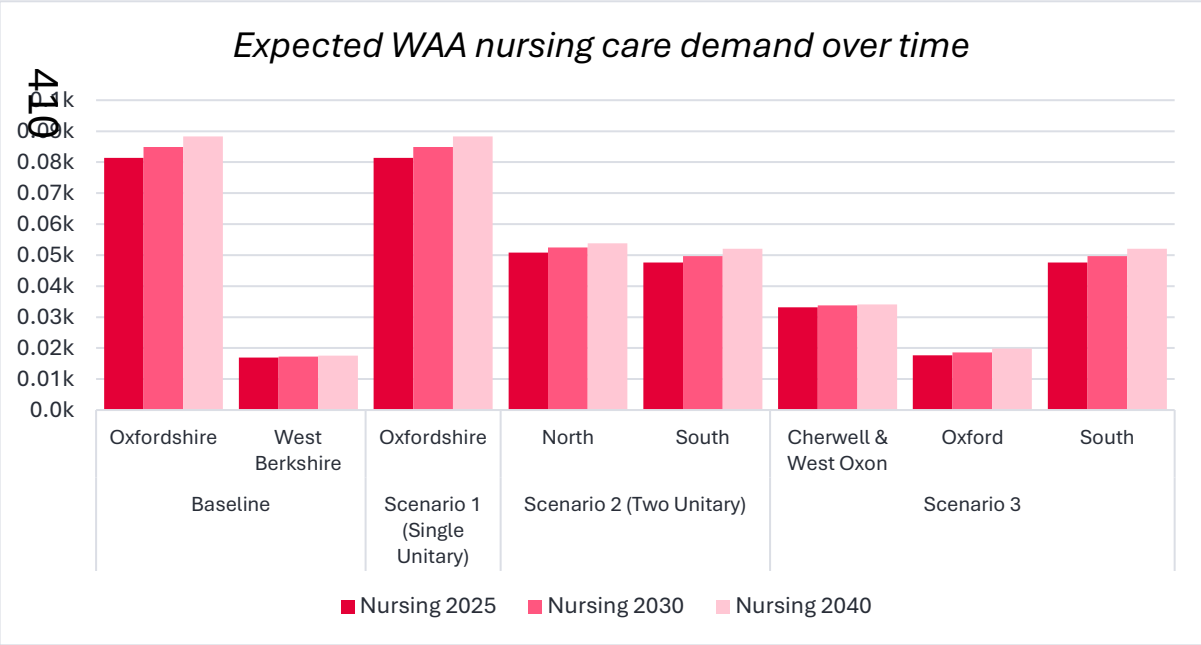
NURSING CARE DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The following slides show the expected demand for Working Age Adults in 2025, 2030 and 2040. The expected demand is driven by population forecasts in each new unitary as well as the effect of ordinary residence on the prevalence in each new unitary.

The graph on the left shows total demand in 2025, 2030 and 2040, in general this is proportional to population in the new unitary authorities. This analysis will show the expected growth in each unitary and identify areas that are expected to see high growth.

The table to the right of each graph shows the prevalence per 10,000 Older Adults. Changes to prevalence over time will reflect where current residing address is different to the originating address of future demand and demand therefore re-balances over time due to ordinary residence rules. Therefore, some areas will have a high prevalence in 2025 which then drops by 2040. Other areas have a low prevalence in 2025 with prevalence increasing by 2040 or no change to prevalence.

For Domiciliary Care and Other demand there is no impact of ordinary residence, therefore prevalence remains consistent.



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Nursing care Prevalence 2025	Nursing care Prevalence 2030	Nursing care Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	1.8	1.8	1.8
	West Berkshire	1.8	1.8	1.8
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	1.8	1.8	1.8
Scenario 2	North	1.9	1.8	1.8
	South	1.8	1.8	1.8
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	2.0	2.0	1.9
	Oxford	1.6	1.7	1.7
	South	1.8	1.8	1.8

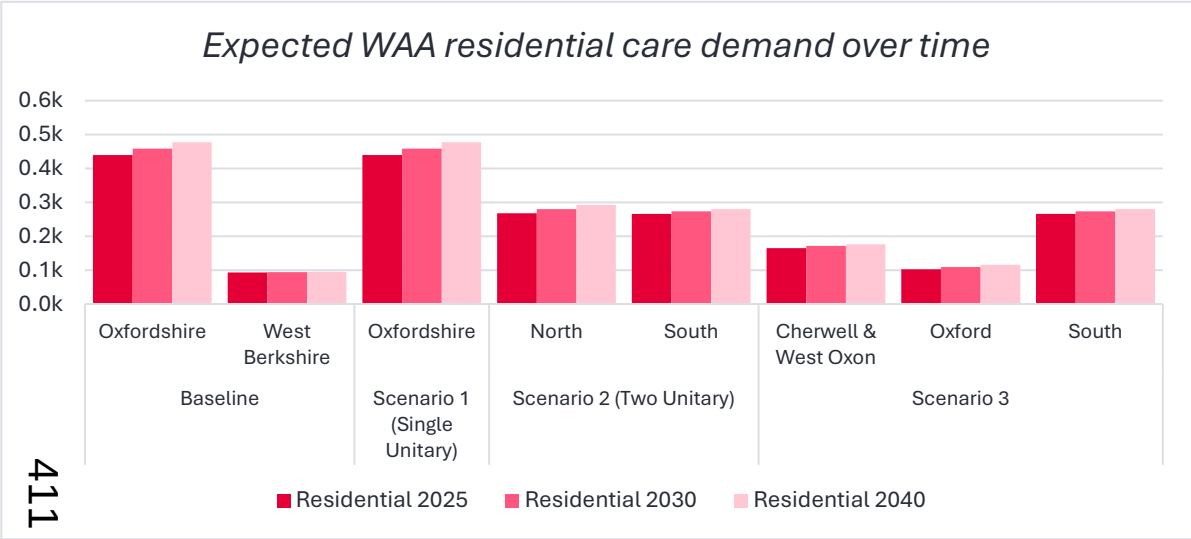
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence is shown per 10k working age adults (18-64).

Adult Social Care: Working Age Adult demand

RESIDENTIAL CARE AND SUPPORTED LIVING DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING



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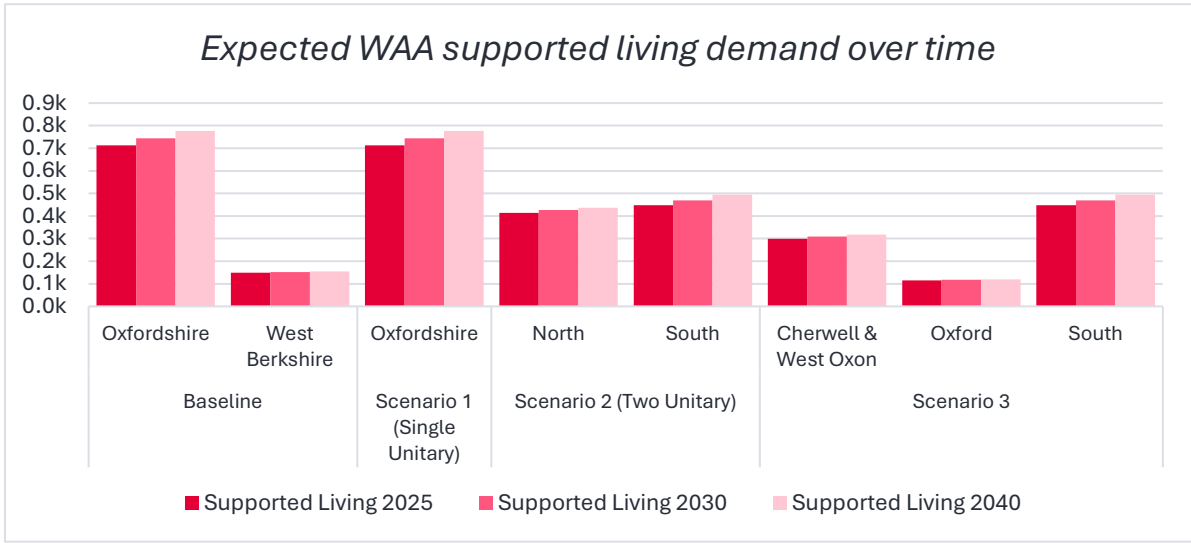


Scenario	Proposed Authority	Residential care Prevalence 2025	Residential care Prevalence 2030	Residential care Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	9.9	9.9	9.8
	West Berkshire	9.9	9.9	9.9
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	9.9	9.9	9.8
Scenario 2	North	9.8	9.8	9.9
	South	9.9	9.9	9.8
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	10.0	10.0	9.9
	Oxford	9.5	9.6	9.9
	South	9.9	9.9	9.8

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Supported Living Prevalence 2025	Supported Living Prevalence 2030	Supported Living Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	16	16	16
	West Berkshire	16	16	16
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	16	16	16
Scenario 2	North	15	15	15
	South	17	17	17
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	18	18	18
	Oxford	11	10	10
	South	17	17	17

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

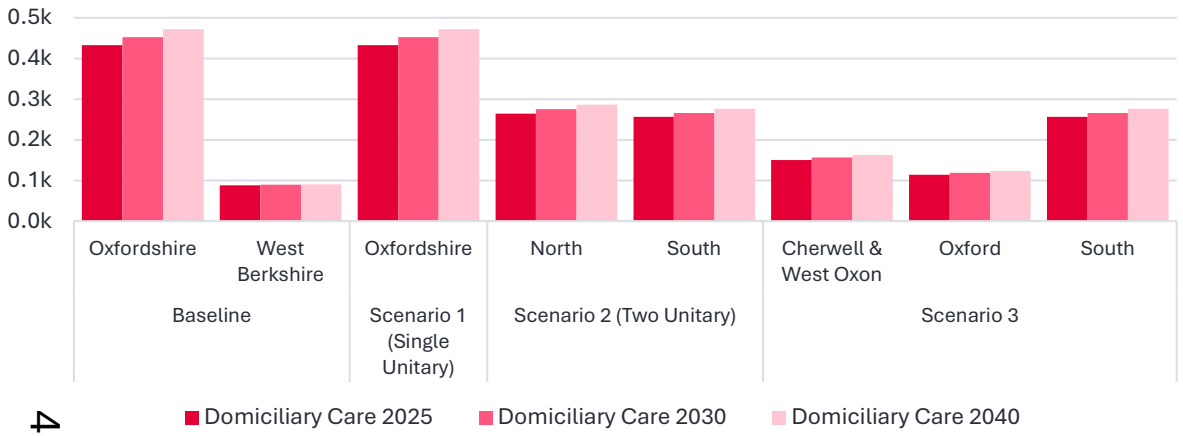
PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence is shown per 10k working age adults (18-64).

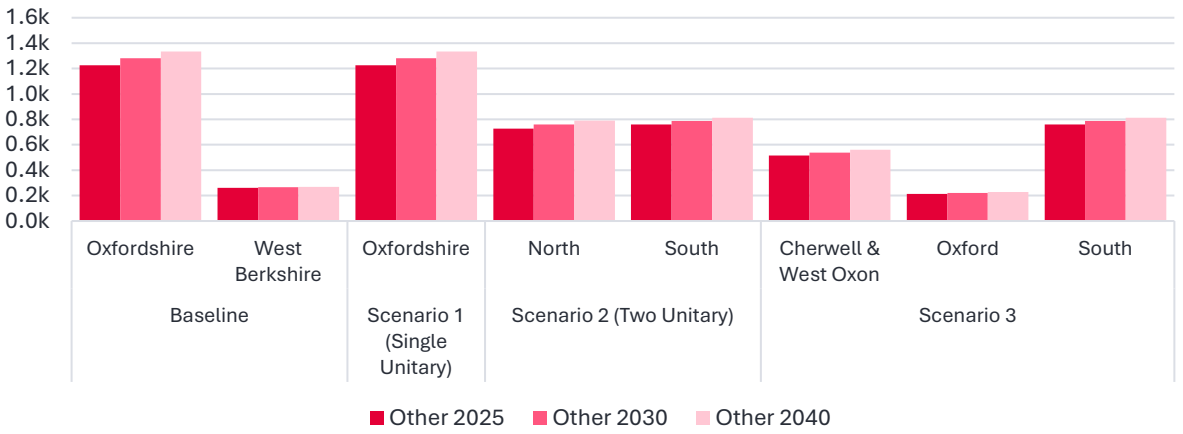
Adult Social Care: Working Age Adult demand

DOMICILIARY CARE AND OTHER DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

Expected WAA domiciliary care demand over time



Expected WAA other demand over time



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Domiciliary Care Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	10
	West Berkshire	9
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	10
Scenario 2	North	10
	South	10
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	9
	Oxford	11
	South	10

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Other Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	27
	West Berkshire	28
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	27
Scenario 2	North	27
	South	28
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	31
	Oxford	20
	South	28

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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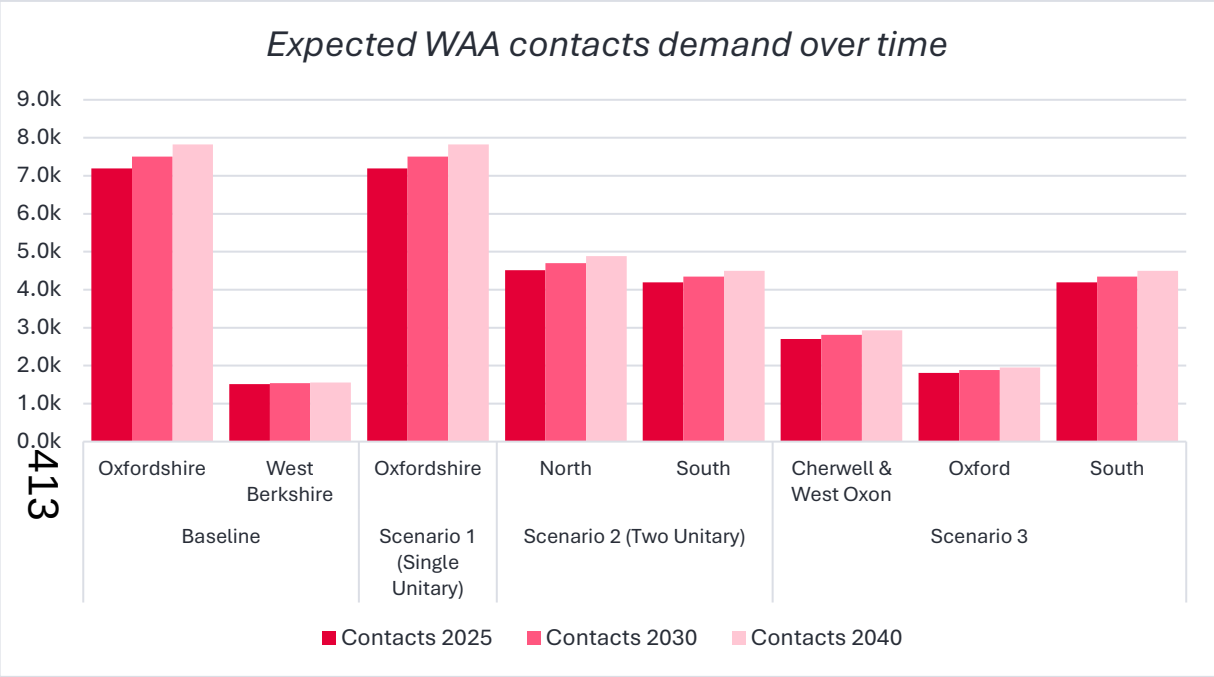
For Domiciliary Care and Other demand there is no impact of ordinary residence, therefore prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k working age adults (18-64).

Adult Social Care: Working Age Adult demand

CONTACTS DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Contacts Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	161
	West Berkshire	162
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	161
Scenario 2	North	165
	South	157
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	164
	Oxford	167
	South	157

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

For contacts there is no impact of ordinary residence, therefore prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k working age adults (18-64).

Adult Social Care: Older Adult unit costs

UNIT COST VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The table shows a breakdown of the placement unit cost over time by setting in the proposed unitary formations. This has been calculated from the council data provided and refers to net costs.

For each proposed unitarity formation unit price forecasts are based on a real-terms average of the previous cost data provided. The impact of inflation, changing demographics, and local cost variation has then been forecast.

Our analysis more widely had found there to be a correlation between unit cost and scale of existing upper tier local authorities. Controlling for deprivation, demographics and median income this applies an expected uplift in unit price for smaller unitary authorities. Detailed information is included in the methodology section of the appendix.

Costs were provided in the data return aggregated at a county level. In addition to this, cost data for supported living was not available.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Nursing Care				Residential Care				Domiciliary Care				Supported Living				Other			
		2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£688	£812	£1,127	64%	£636	£751	£1,042	64%	£271	£319	£443	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£419	£493	£685	63%
	West Berkshire	£706	£832	£1,154	63%	£652	£768	£1,065	63%	£278	£328	£455	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£430	£507	£703	63%
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£688	£812	£1,127	64%	£636	£751	£1,042	64%	£271	£319	£443	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£419	£493	£685	63%
Scenario 2	North	£672	£793	£1,101	64%	£621	£733	£1,017	64%	£265	£312	£432	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£409	£482	£668	63%
	South	£715	£843	£1,170	64%	£661	£779	£1,081	64%	£282	£332	£460	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£435	£513	£711	63%
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£680	£802	£1,114	64%	£629	£742	£1,030	64%	£268	£316	£438	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£414	£488	£677	63%
	Oxford	£664	£784	£1,089	64%	£613	£724	£1,005	64%	£261	£308	£427	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£404	£476	£660	63%
	South	£715	£843	£1,170	64%	£661	£779	£1,081	64%	£282	£332	£460	63%	£0	£0	£0	-	£435	£513	£711	63%

Values shown are £/week.

Data: Council data
Assumptions: see appendix for UA assumptions and step-up-factor. Inflation at 3.33%.

Adult Social Care: Working Age Adult unit costs

UNIT COST VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The table shows a breakdown of the placement unit cost over time by setting in the proposed unitary formations. This has been calculated from the council data provided and refers to net costs.

For each proposed unitarity formation unit price forecasts are based on a real-terms average of the previous cost data provided. The impact of inflation, changing demographics, and local cost variation has then been forecast.

Our analysis more widely had found there to be a correlation between unit cost and scale of existing upper tier local authorities. Controlling for deprivation, demographics and median income this applies an expected uplift in unit price for smaller unitary authorities. Detailed information is included in the methodology section of the appendix.

Costs were provided in the data return aggregated at a county level.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Nursing Care				Residential Care				Domiciliary Care				Supported Living				Other			
		2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£1,879	£2,215	£3,077	64%	£1,763	£2,077	£2,882	63%	£278	£328	£455	63%	£666	£785	£1,090	64%	£527	£621	£862	63%
	West Berkshire	£1,903	£2,242	£3,110	63%	£1,766	£2,080	£2,886	63%	£286	£336	£467	63%	£678	£798	£1,108	63%	£541	£637	£884	63%
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£1,879	£2,215	£3,077	64%	£1,763	£2,077	£2,882	63%	£278	£328	£455	63%	£666	£785	£1,090	64%	£527	£621	£862	63%
Scenario 2	North	£1,833	£2,161	£3,003	64%	£1,721	£2,027	£2,812	63%	£272	£320	£444	63%	£650	£766	£1,064	64%	£515	£606	£841	63%
	South	£1,944	£2,291	£3,181	64%	£1,817	£2,140	£2,970	63%	£289	£340	£472	63%	£690	£813	£1,128	64%	£548	£645	£895	63%
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£1,857	£2,188	£3,040	64%	£1,743	£2,053	£2,849	63%	£275	£324	£449	63%	£658	£775	£1,076	64%	£521	£614	£852	63%
	Oxford	£1,811	£2,136	£2,970	64%	£1,698	£2,001	£2,777	64%	£268	£316	£438	63%	£644	£759	£1,054	64%	£509	£599	£831	63%
	South	£1,944	£2,291	£3,181	64%	£1,817	£2,140	£2,970	63%	£289	£340	£472	63%	£690	£813	£1,128	64%	£548	£645	£895	63%

Values shown are £/week.

Data: Council data
Assumptions: see appendix for UA assumptions and step-up-factor. Inflation at 3.33%.

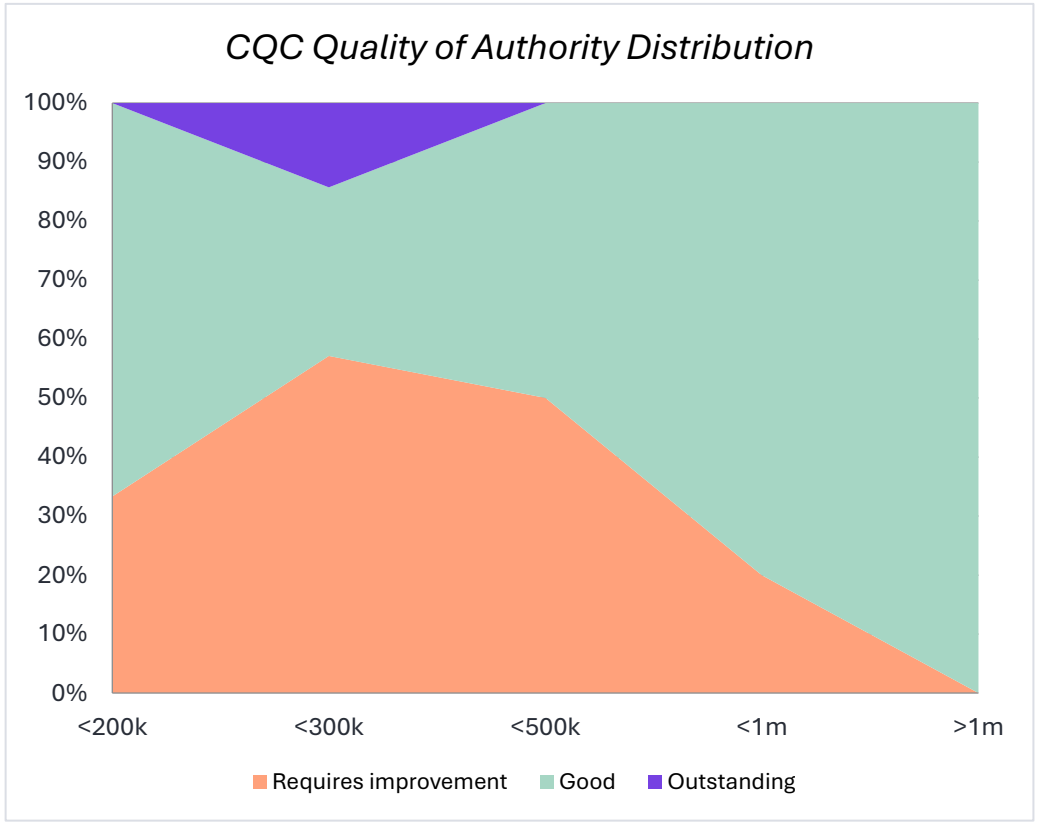
Adult Social Care: Quality

THERE IS LIMITED NATIONALLY AVAILABLE DATA TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS OF QUALITY BASED ON POPULATION SIZE

The CQC is currently in the process of implementing a new assessment framework for local authorities and integrated care networks. This means that limited CQC ratings have been published at the time of completing this analysis.

There was not sufficient data for us to provide a meaningful model based on these published outcomes. Therefore, no conclusions have been drawn, even at a high level, from the published reports.

As with OFSTED, income, deprivation and geographic location could be more influential than population alone, however further data and information is required to draw meaningful conclusions.



Adult Social Care
SERVICE COST SUMMARY

The predicted spend for each scenario is included in the table below alongside the expected service cost in 2025 and 2040. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes.

In general, there is an increase in combined service cost for scenarios with more authorities. This is driven by the expected uplift on placement unit costs applied to smaller authorities and higher combined staffing overheads due to having more authorities and therefore leadership teams. Note, the model only accounts for the additional uplift in staffing costs for delivery teams and there is an expected additional increase from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, that have not been modelled in this analysis.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Predicted spend for scenario 2025	ASC service cost 2025 (gross placements cost + staffing)	Predicted spend for scenario 2040	ASC service cost 2040 (gross placements cost + staffing)
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£311.2m	£252m	£574.8m	£470m
	West Berkshire		£59m		£105m
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£252.1m	£252m	£469.8m	£470m
Scenario 2	North	£312.3m	£146m	£577.7m	£264m
	South		£166m		£313m
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£314.4m	£104m	£581.2m	£187m
	Oxford		£44m		£80m
	South		£166m		£313m

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council provided cost data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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Section 2b: Children's Social Care

The scope of this section is to provide insight into the likely impacts of each proposed scenario on Children's Social Care, covering demand, cost and quality over the next 15 years.

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Children's Social Care

SERVICE COST VARIATION AND FORECASTING

This analysis has considered the variation in the cost of delivering care between each of the proposed unitary formations. This cost includes both the cost of the provision of care, in addition to the authority staffing cost associated with delivering CSC support (where this data has been provided). Staffing costs resulting from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, that have not been modelled in this analysis. Cost growth includes both the expected impact of increased demand, increased unit cost and wage increases. As this work has been performed without any personal identifiable data and caseload sizes for Children in Care settings are small, changes in the blend of settings with time have not been modelled. Should this blend change, this may cause a variation in unit cost over time i.e. due to a decline in internal fostering capacity or increase in Residential Care placements, but this has not been included in the model. Spend per resident per year compares the cost for this service to total number of residents in the new authority. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes.

This will support understanding if certain scenarios create variation in spend per resident both in 2025 and the future, showing where there are unitary authorities with a higher spend per resident to the baseline scenario as well as unitary authorities that have high cost growth in the future. Growth in cost is driven by inflation and the different growth rates in demand across constituent areas within proposed authorities.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Spend per resident 2025	Spend per resident 2040	% growth in spend (2025-2040)	CSC service cost 2025 (gross placements cost + staffing)
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£166	£246	61%	£82m / £39m
	West Berkshire	£196	£291	52%	£20m / £12m
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£166	£246	61%	£82m / £39m
Scenario 2	North	£181	£272	62%	£52m / £26m
	South	£162	£237	57%	£49m / £25m
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£169	£250	60%	£29m / £18m
	Oxford	£228	£349	65%	£24m / £11m
	South	£162	£237	57%	£49m / £25m

CSC provision spend 2025
CSC staffing cost 2025

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Children's Social Care: Population

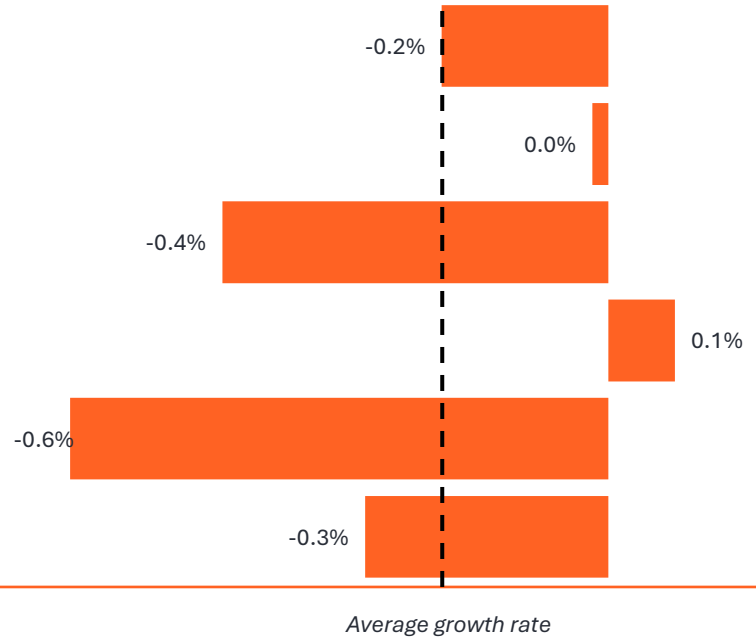
U18 POPULATION VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The existing U18 population is shown across the districts in the geography. The below table shows the expected growth rate for U18s in each of the districts.

This analysis shows the underlying population trends that drive the change in demand for each of the new unitary authorities in the future.

District	U18 population by year			Percentage growth in U18 from 2025-2040	Average percentage of Authority U18
	2025	2030	2040		
Cherwell	33.9k	33.3k	33.0k	-3%	20%
Oxford	27.4k	27.3k	27.3k	0%	17%
South Oxfordshire	30.3k	29.2k	28.5k	-6%	19%
Vale of White Horse	32.5k	32.5k	32.9k	1%	21%
West Berkshire	34.4k	32.7k	31.6k	-8%	20%
West Oxfordshire	23.2k	22.6k	22.3k	-4%	19%

Annual growth rate of U18 population



Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

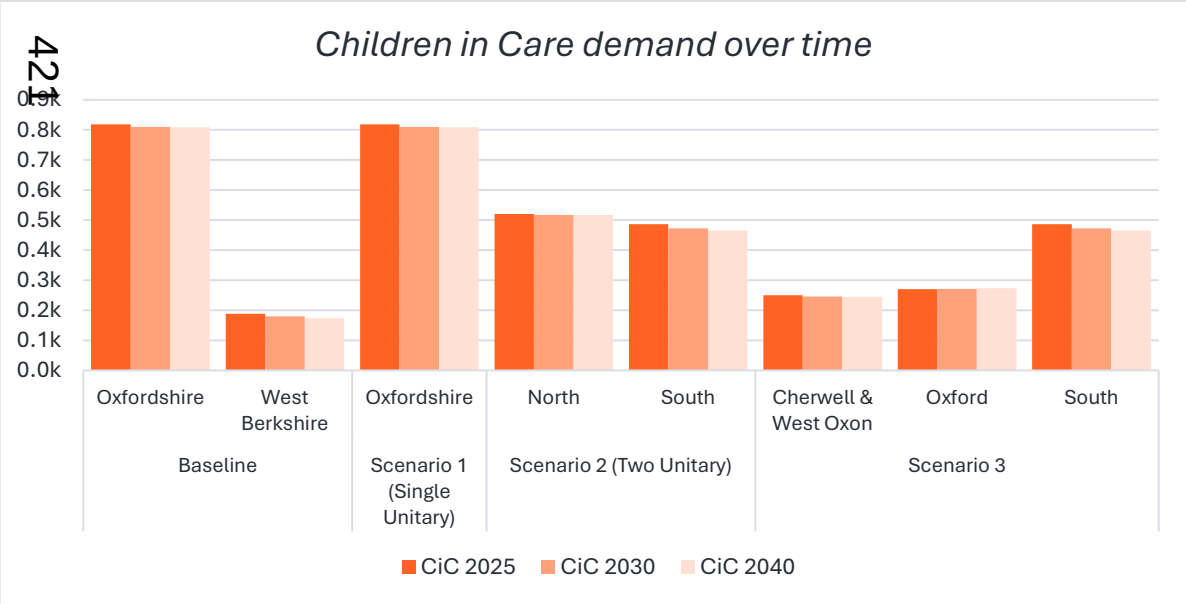
Children's Social Care: Demand

CHILDREN IN CARE DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The following slides show the expected demand for Children's Social Care in 2025, 2030 and 2040. The expected demand is driven by population forecasts in each new unitary.

The graph on the left shows total demand in 2025, 2030 and 2040, in general this is proportional to population in the new unitary authorities. This analysis will show the expected change in demand in each unitary.

The table to the right of each graph shows the prevalence per 10,000 U18 population. This remains consistent over time as agreed in the methodology sessions. As this work has been performed without any personal identifiable data and caseload sizes for Children in Care settings are small, changes in the blend of settings with time have not been modelled.



Scenario	Proposed Authority	CiC Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	56
	West Berkshire	55
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	56
Scenario 2	North	62
	South	50
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	44
	Oxford	99
	South	50

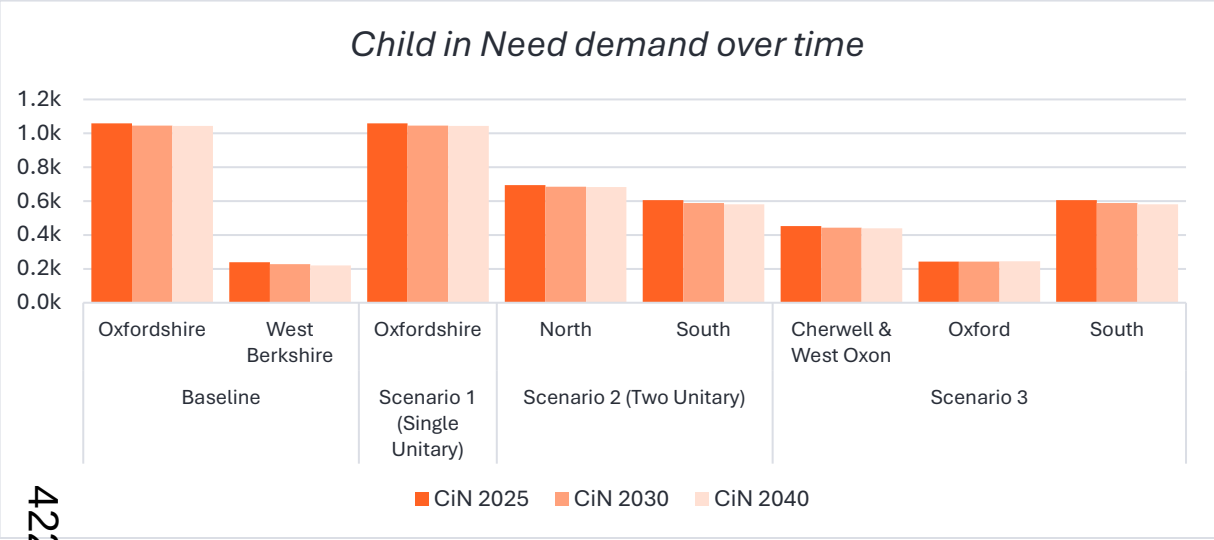
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

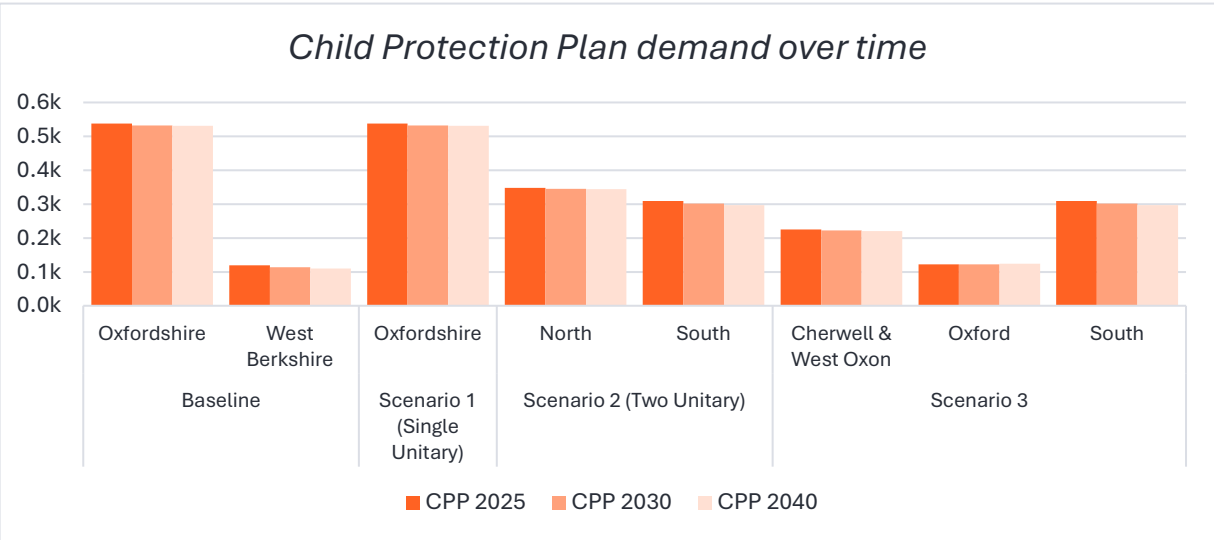
Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k U18 population.

Children's Social Care: Demand

DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING



Scenario	Proposed Authority	CiN Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	72
	West Berkshire	70
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	72
Scenario 2	North	82
	South	62
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	79
	Oxford	88
	South	62



Scenario	Proposed Authority	CPP Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	36
	West Berkshire	35
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	36
Scenario 2	North	41
	South	32
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	40
	Oxford	45
	South	32

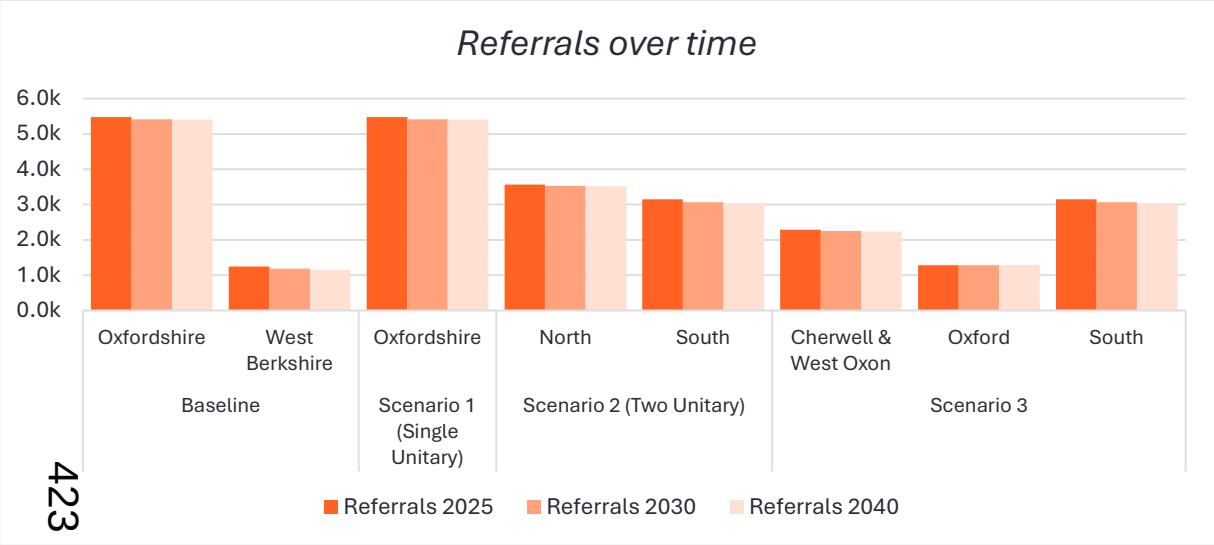
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

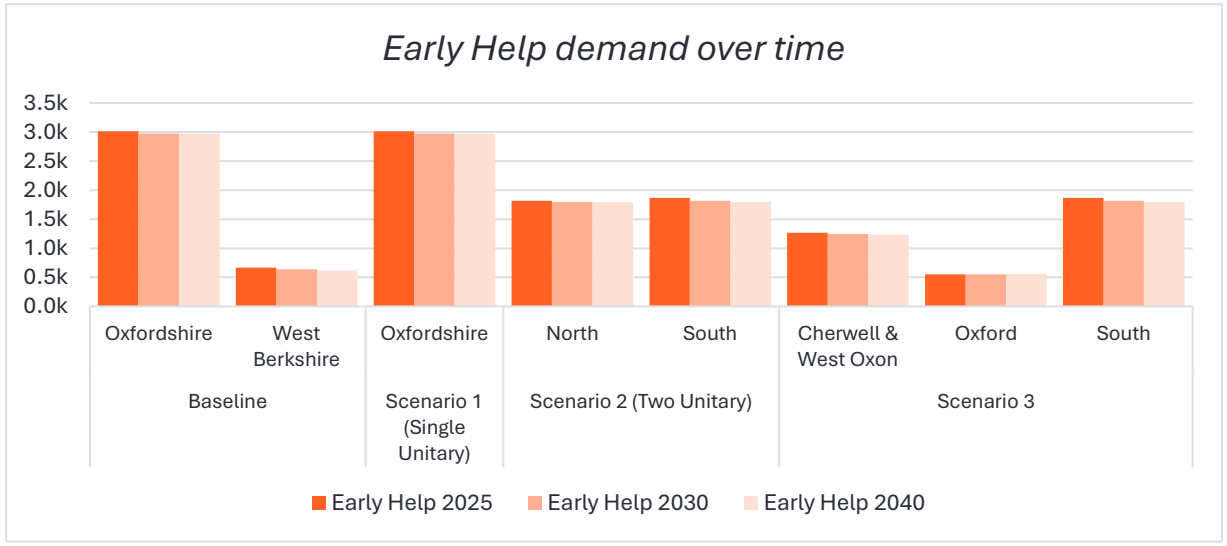
Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k U18 population.

Children's Social Care: Demand

DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Referrals Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	372
	West Berkshire	362
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	372
Scenario 2	North	423
	South	324
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	401
	Oxford	468
	South	324



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Early Help Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	205
	West Berkshire	195
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	205
Scenario 2	North	215
	South	192
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	222
	Oxford	201
	South	192

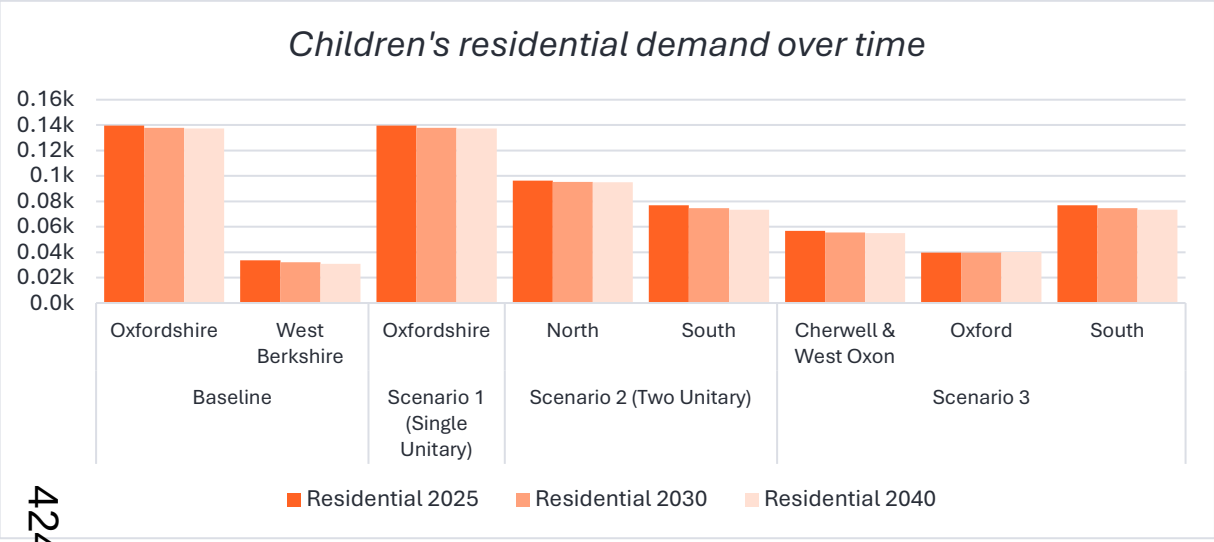
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

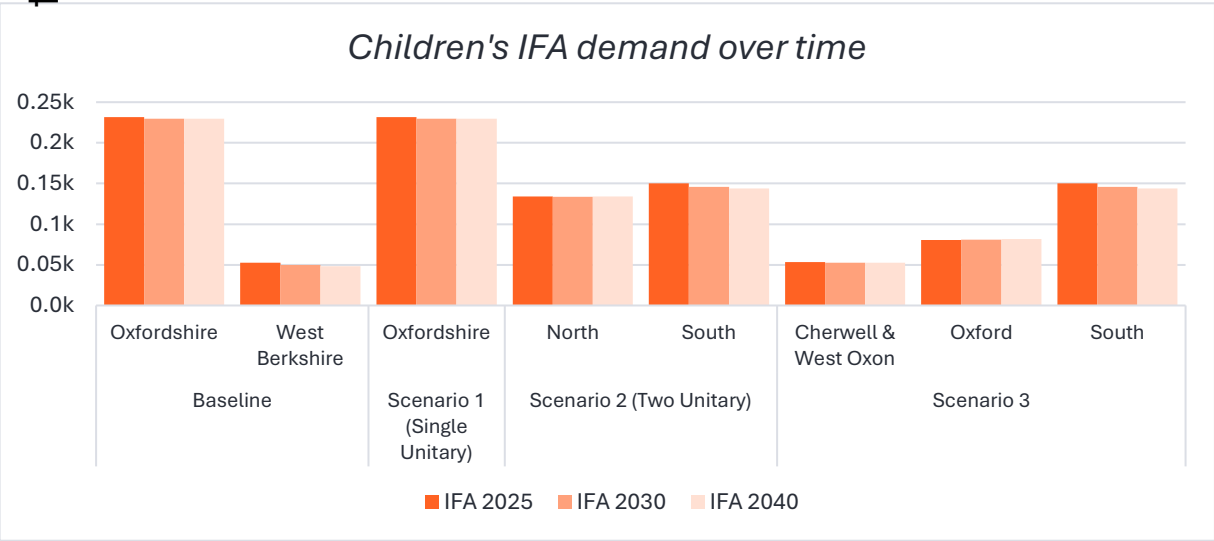
PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k U18 population.

Children's Social Care: Demand

DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING





Scenario	Proposed Authority	Residential care Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	9.5
	West Berkshire	9.8
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	9.5
Scenario 2	North	11.4
	South	7.9
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	9.9
	Oxford	14.5
	South	7.9

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Independent Fostering Agency Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	15.7
	West Berkshire	15.3
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	15.7
Scenario 2	North	15.9
	South	15.4
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	9.4
	Oxford	29.4
	South	15.4

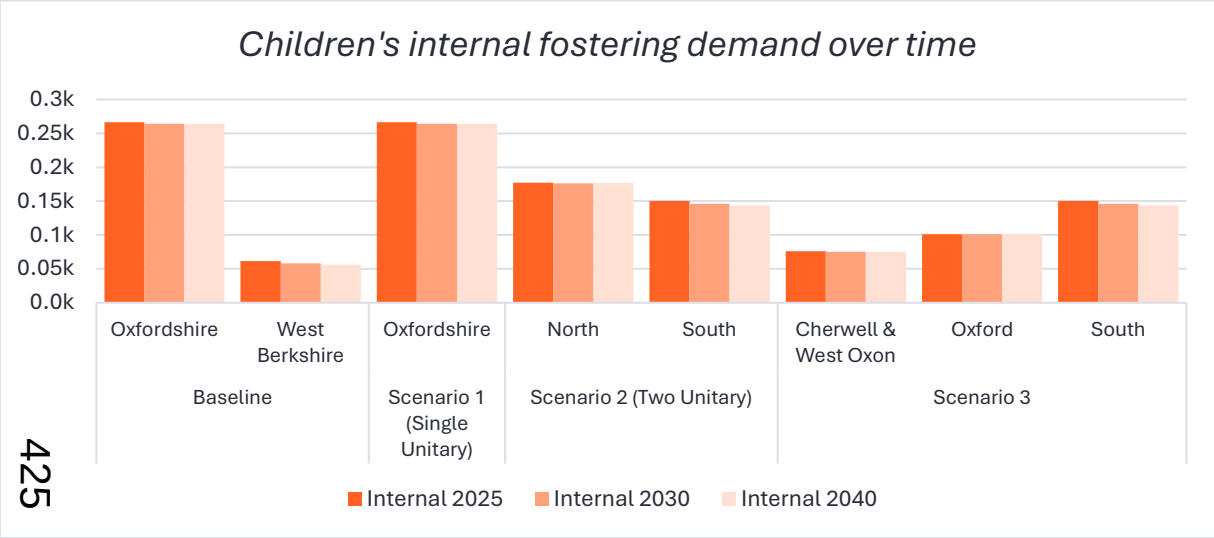
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

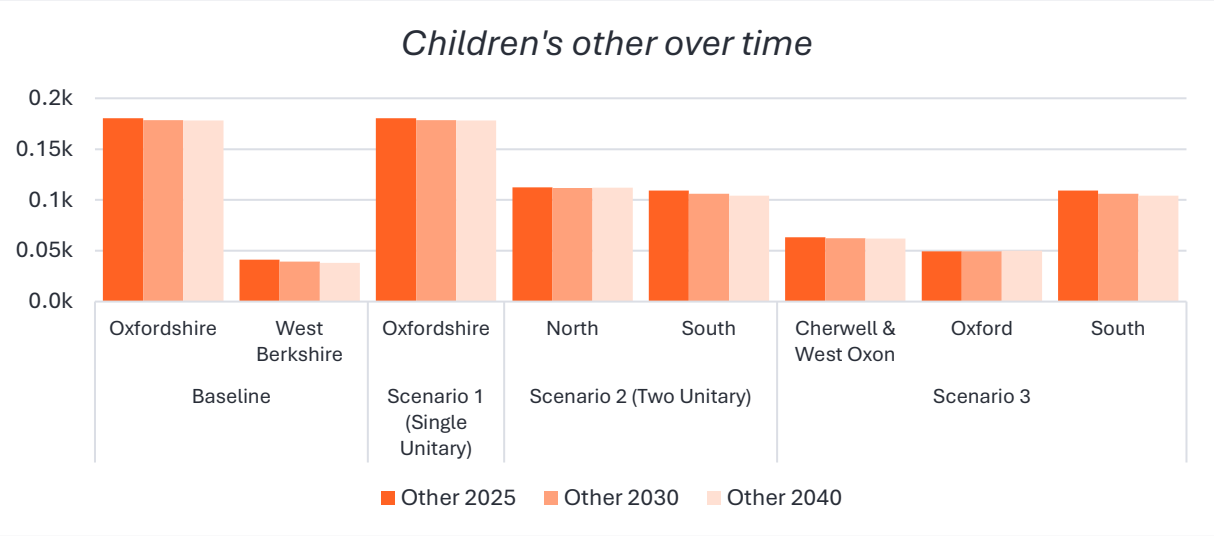
PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k U18 population.

Children's Social Care: Demand

DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING





Scenario	Proposed Authority	Internal Fostering Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	18
	West Berkshire	18
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	18
Scenario 2	North	21
	South	15
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	13
	Oxford	37
	South	15

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Other Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	12
	West Berkshire	12
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	12
Scenario 2	North	13
	South	11
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	11
	Oxford	18
	South	11

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k U18 population.

Children's Social Care: Unit costs

UNIT COST DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The table shows a breakdown of the placement unit cost over time by setting in the proposed unitary formations. This has been calculated from the council data provided and refers to gross costs.

For each proposed unitarity formation unit price forecasts are based on a real-terms average of the previous cost data provided. The impact of inflation, changing demographics, and local cost variation has then been forecast.

Our analysis more widely had found there to be a correlation between unit cost and scale of existing upper tier local authorities. Controlling for deprivation, demographics and median income this applies an expected uplift in unit price for smaller unitary authorities. Detailed information is included in the methodology section of the appendix.

£ / Week		Children in Care				Residential Care				Independent Fostering Agency				Internal Fostering				Other			
Scenario	Proposed Authority	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£1,916	£2,254	£3,123	63%	£6,197	£7,299	£10,127	63%	£1,075	£1,267	£1,757	63%	£615	£725	£1,006	63%	£1,603	£1,889	£2,620	63%
	West Berkshire	£2,010	£2,367	£3,284	63%	£6,371	£7,504	£10,410	63%	£1,105	£1,302	£1,806	63%	£633	£745	£1,034	63%	£1,648	£1,941	£2,693	63%
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£1,916	£2,254	£3,123	63%	£6,197	£7,299	£10,127	63%	£1,075	£1,267	£1,757	63%	£615	£725	£1,006	63%	£1,603	£1,889	£2,620	63%
Scenario 2	North	£1,934	£2,273	£3,147	63%	£6,050	£7,126	£9,885	63%	£1,050	£1,236	£1,715	63%	£601	£708	£982	63%	£1,565	£1,844	£2,558	63%
	South	£1,935	£2,278	£3,157	63%	£6,441	£7,587	£10,526	63%	£1,118	£1,316	£1,826	63%	£640	£753	£1,045	63%	£1,667	£1,963	£2,723	63%
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£2,206	£2,591	£3,586	63%	£6,127	£7,216	£10,011	63%	£1,063	£1,252	£1,737	63%	£608	£717	£994	63%	£1,585	£1,867	£2,590	63%
	Oxford	£1,688	£1,989	£2,760	63%	£5,976	£7,039	£9,765	63%	£1,037	£1,221	£1,694	63%	£593	£699	£970	63%	£1,546	£1,821	£2,526	63%
	South	£1,935	£2,278	£3,157	63%	£6,441	£7,587	£10,526	63%	£1,118	£1,316	£1,826	63%	£640	£753	£1,045	63%	£1,667	£1,963	£2,723	63%

Data: Council data
Assumptions: see appendix for UA assumptions and step-up-factor. Inflation at 3.33%.

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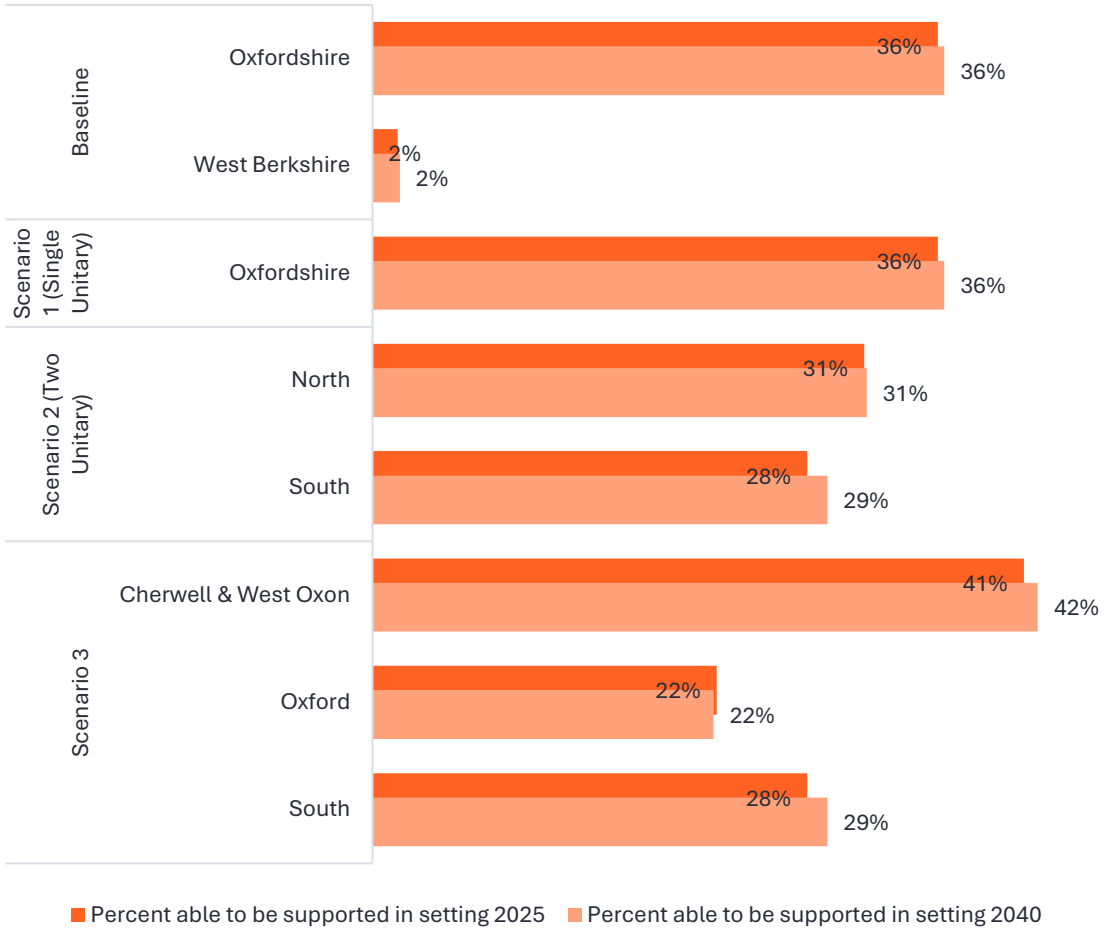
Children's Social Care: Capacity

PLACEMENT DEMAND AND CAPACITY

The placement capacity for internal fostering has been compared to the expected Children in Care caseload size as determined by the model.

Where there is a lower percentage, this indicates that a lower proportion of Children in Care can be supported in internal fostering. This likely means that there will be a greater use of IFA and residential , reducing the number of children who can be supported in a family-based setting.

Proportion of Children in Care that could be supported by our internal fostering capacity over time



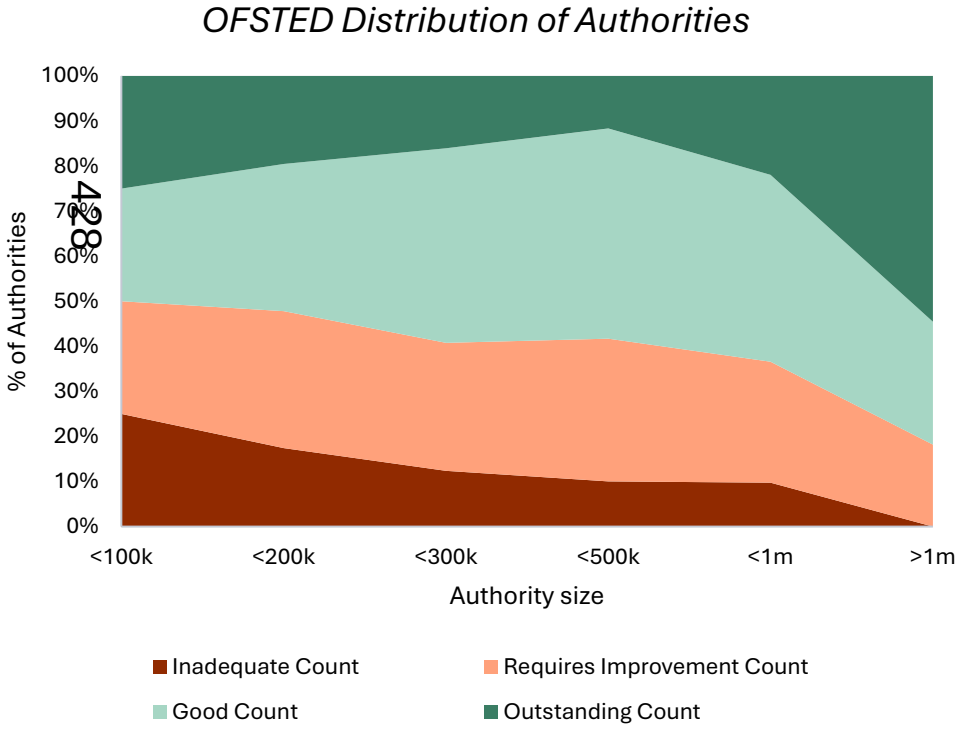
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate.

Children's Social Care: Quality

SMALLER AUTHORITIES ARE LESS LIKELY TO ACHIEVE GOOD OR OUTSTANDING OFSTED RATINGS

Based on a regression model, controlling for authority, location deprivation and median income the probability of an authority achieving good or outstanding reduces as the authority shrinks.

An indication of the likelihood of an authority achieving a good or outstanding rating based on its likely characteristics has been calculated. This gives a score of 1 – 4 which relates to the probability of achieving inadequate (1) to outstanding (4). This analysis does not account for current OFSTED scores, or the effect of splitting or merging current unitary authorities and practises. This analysis should therefore only be treated as an indication of outcome, rather than a forecast or prediction.



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Total population	Median income	IMD Score	OFSTED prediction score
Baseline	Oxfordshire	725.7k	£36.5k	11.60	3.10
	West Berkshire	159.8k	£36.7k	9.89	2.84
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	725.7k	£36.5k	11.60	3.10
Scenario 2	North	429.3k	£35.4k	13.83	2.87
	South	456.1k	£37.7k	8.89	3.05
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	275.1k	£34.8k	12.06	2.78
	Oxford	154.2k	£36.4k	16.99	2.76
	South	456.1k	£37.7k	8.89	3.05

Children's Social Care

SERVICE COST SUMMARY

The predicted spend for each scenario is included in the table below alongside the expected service cost in 2025 and 2040. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes.

In general, there is an increase in combined service cost for scenarios with more authorities. This is driven by the expected uplift on placement unit costs applied to smaller authorities and higher combined staffing overheads due to having more authorities and therefore leadership teams. Note, the model only accounts for the additional uplift in staffing costs for delivery teams and there is an expected additional increase from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, that have not been modelled in this analysis.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Predicted spend for scenario 2025	CSC service cost 2025 (gross placements cost + staffing)	Predicted spend for scenario 2040	CSC service cost 2040 (gross placements cost + staffing)
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£151.6m	£120m	£241.5m	£194m
	West Berkshire		£31m		£48m
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£120.2m	£120m	£193.9m	£194m
Scenario 2	North	£151.6m	£78m	£241.5m	£126m
	South		£74m		£116m
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£155.5m	£47m	£247.8m	£74m
	Oxford		£35m		£58m
	South		£74m		£116m

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Section 2c: SEND and Education

The scope of this section is to provide insight into the likely impacts of each proposed scenario on SEND, covering demand, cost and quality over the next 15 years.

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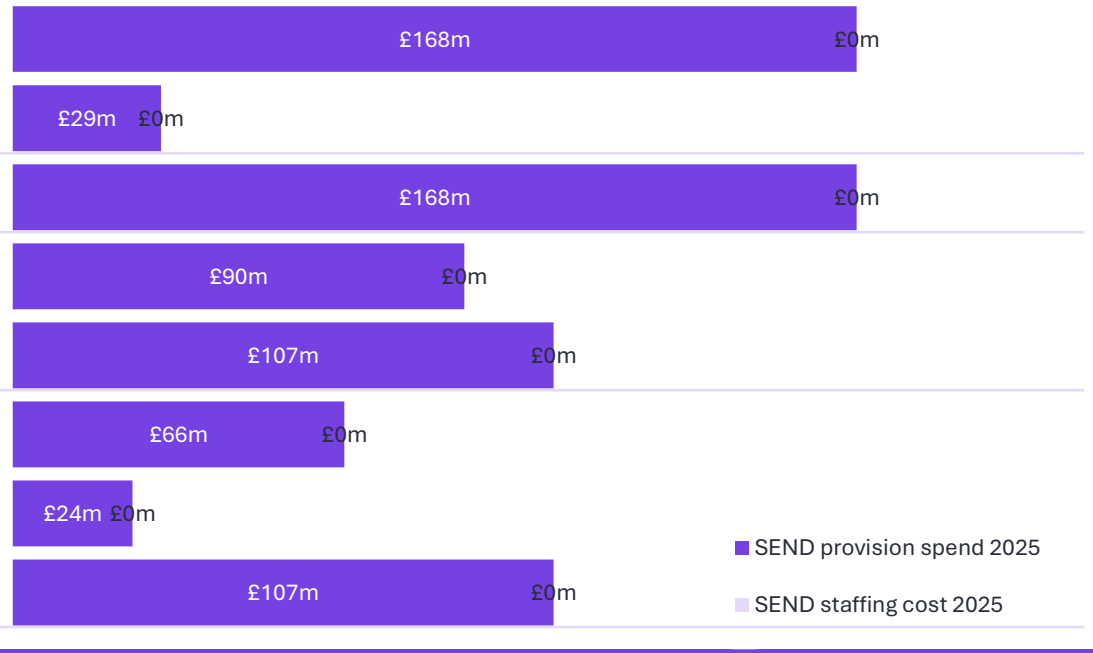
Education: SEND

SERVICE COST VARIATION AND FORECAST

This analysis has considered the variation in the cost of delivering care between each of the proposed unitary formations. This cost includes both the cost of the provision of care, in addition to the authority staffing cost associated with delivering SEND support (where this data has been provided). Staffing costs resulting from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, that have not been modelled in this analysis. Cost growth includes both the expected impact of increased demand, increased unit cost and wage increases. Spend per resident per year compares the cost for this service to total number of residents in the new authority. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes.

This will support understanding if certain scenarios create variation in spend per resident both in 2025 and the future, showing where there are unitary authorities with a higher spend per resident to the baseline scenario as well as unitary authorities that have high cost growth in the future. Growth in cost is driven by inflation and the different growth rates in demand across constituent areas within proposed authorities.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Spend per resident 2025	Spend per resident 2040	% growth in spend (2025-2040)
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£231	£475	123%
	West Berkshire	£184	£482	168%
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£231	£475	123%
Scenario 2	North	£209	£437	126%
	South	£235	£514	133%
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£239	£483	118%
	Oxford	£154	£356	149%
	South	£235	£514	133%



Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Education: School age population

POPULATION VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The existing school aged population is shown across the districts in the geography. The below table shows the expected growth rate for school aged population in each of the districts.

This analysis shows the underlying population trends that drive the change in demand for each of the new unitary authorities in the future.

District	School aged population by year			Percentage growth in school aged population from 2025-2040	Average percentage of Authority school aged	Annual growth rate of school aged population
	2025	2030	2040			
Cherwell	22.7k	22.3k	22.1k	-3%	14%	-0.2%
Oxford	19.0k	18.9k	18.9k	0%	12%	0.0%
South Oxfordshire	20.9k	20.2k	19.7k	-6%	13%	-0.4%
Vale of White Horse	22.4k	22.4k	22.6k	1%	14%	0.1%
West Berkshire	24.5k	23.3k	22.5k	-8%	14%	-0.6%
West Oxfordshire	16.1k	15.7k	15.5k	-4%	13%	-0.3%

Average growth rate

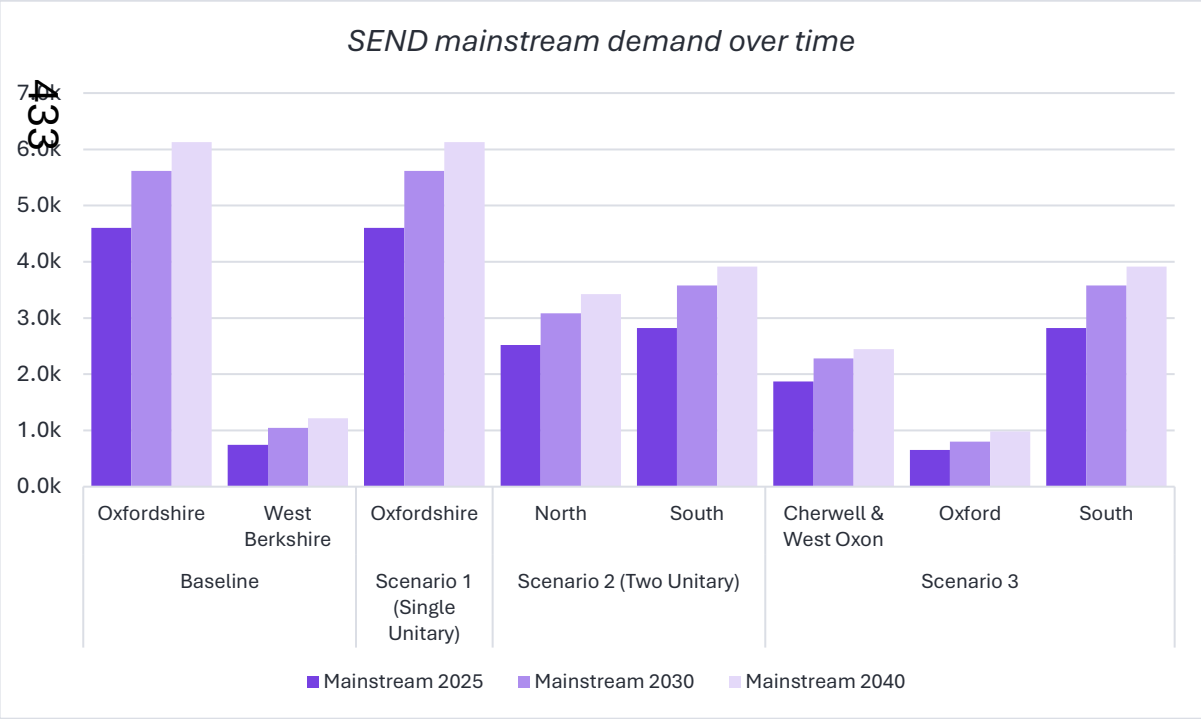
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Education: SEND
MAINSTREAM DEMAND

The following slides show the expected demand for EHCPs in 2025, 2030 and 2040. The expected demand is driven by population forecasts in each new unitary as well as the increasing prevalence of EHCPs.

The graph on the left shows total demand in 2025, 2030 and 2040, in general this is proportional to population in the new unitary authorities. This analysis will show the expected growth in each unitary and identify areas that are expected to see high growth.

The table to the right of each graph shows the prevalence per 10,000 under 25 population. This is expected to grow at the rate seen in the data provided; however, total prevalence is capped at 550 per 10,000, this is as it is expected that the current growth will flatten off. The 550 per 10,000 is a previous value Newton have used in work undertaken with the Department for Education (DfE).



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Mainstream Prevalence 2025	Mainstream Prevalence 2030	Mainstream Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	216	252	264
	West Berkshire	167	232	266
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	216	252	264
Scenario 2	North	190	223	238
	South	226	276	292
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	250	292	302
	Oxford	112	133	157
	South	226	276	292

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Capped prevalence at 550/10k under 25s. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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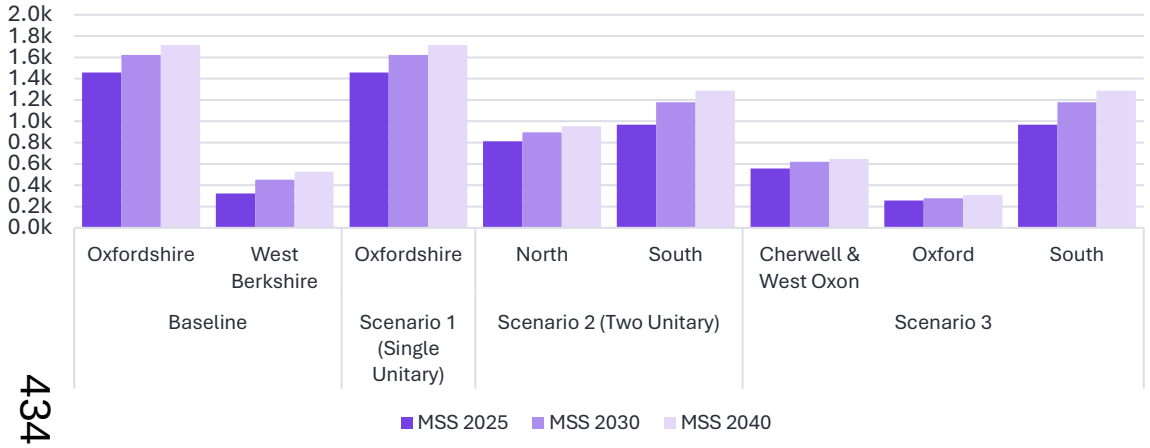
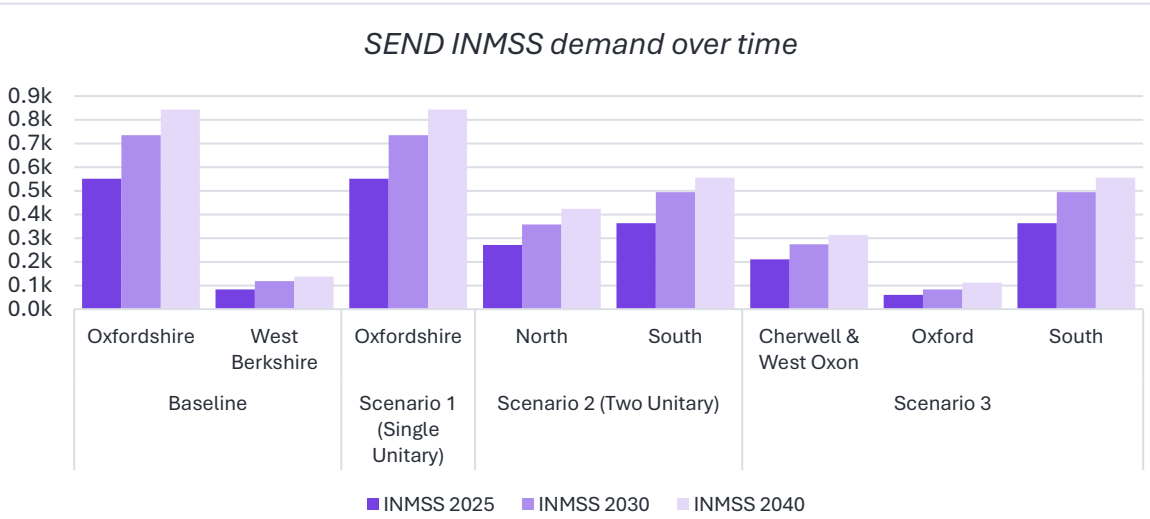
Prevalence increases with time based off current END growth. Prevalence is shown per 10k under 25 population.

Education: SEND

MAINTAINED SPECIAL SCHOOLS (MSS) AND INDEPENDENT NON-MAINTAINED SPECIAL SCHOOLS (INMSS) DEMAND





Scenario	Proposed Authority	MSS Prevalence 2025	MSS Prevalence 2030	MSS Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	68	73	74
	West Berkshire	72	100	115
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	68	73	74
Scenario 2	North	61	65	66
	South	77	91	96
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	74	80	80
	Oxford	44	46	49
	South	77	91	96

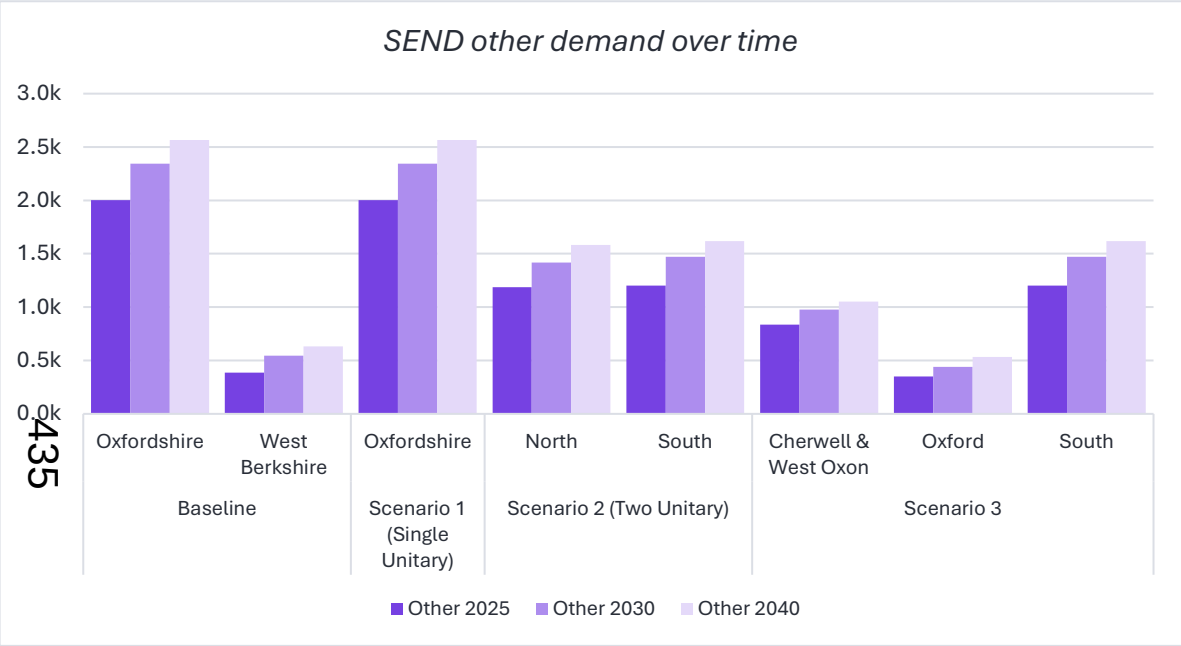
Scenario	Proposed Authority	INMSS Prevalence 2025	INMSS Prevalence 2030	INMSS Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	26	33	36
	West Berkshire	19	26	30
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	26	33	36
Scenario 2	North	20	26	30
	South	29	38	41
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	28	35	39
	Oxford	11	14	18
	South	29	38	41

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Capped prevalence at 550/10k under 25s. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence increases with time based off current SEND growth. Prevalence is shown per 10k under 25 population. MSS: Maintained Special Schools.
INMSS: Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools.

Education: SEND
OTHER DEMAND



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Other Prevalence 2025	Other Prevalence 2030	Other Prevalence 2040
Baseline	Oxfordshire	94	105	111
	West Berkshire	87	121	139
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	94	105	111
Scenario 2	North	89	103	110
	South	96	114	121
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	112	125	130
	Oxford	61	73	85
	South	96	114	121

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Capped prevalence at 550/10k under 25s. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence increases with time based off current SEND growth.
Prevalence is shown per 10k under 25 population. Other contains all SEND demand not captured in the previous categories.

Education: SEND

UNIT COSTS VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The table shows a breakdown of the placement unit cost over time by setting in the proposed unitary formations. This has been calculated from the council data provided, as SEND costs were not broken down by district, the Oxfordshire averages have been used in this calculation for both Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. Costs appeared to be at an annual level, so were divided by 52 weeks to give a weekly cost.

For each proposed unitarity formation unit price forecasts are based on a real-terms average of the previous cost data provided. The impact of inflation and changing demographics has then been forecasted.

£/week		Mainstream				Maintained Special Schools				Independent Non-Maintained Special Schools				Other			
Scenario	Proposed Authority	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change	2025	2030	2040	% change
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£594	£823	63%	£2,296	£2,705	£3,754	63%	£233	£274	£381	63%
	West Berkshire	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£593	£823	63%	£2,295	£2,704	£3,751	63%	£233	£274	£381	63%
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£594	£823	63%	£2,296	£2,705	£3,754	63%	£233	£274	£381	63%
Scenario 2	North	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£594	£823	63%	£2,297	£2,705	£3,755	63%	£233	£274	£381	63%
	South	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£593	£823	63%	£2,296	£2,705	£3,753	63%	£233	£274	£381	63%
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£593	£823	63%	£2,296	£2,705	£3,755	64%	£233	£274	£381	63%
	Oxford	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£594	£824	63%	£2,298	£2,706	£3,754	63%	£233	£275	£381	63%
	South	£164	£193	£268	63%	£504	£593	£823	63%	£2,296	£2,705	£3,753	63%	£233	£274	£381	63%

Data: Council data
Assumptions: see appendix for UA assumptions. Inflation at 3.33%.

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Education: SEND deficit

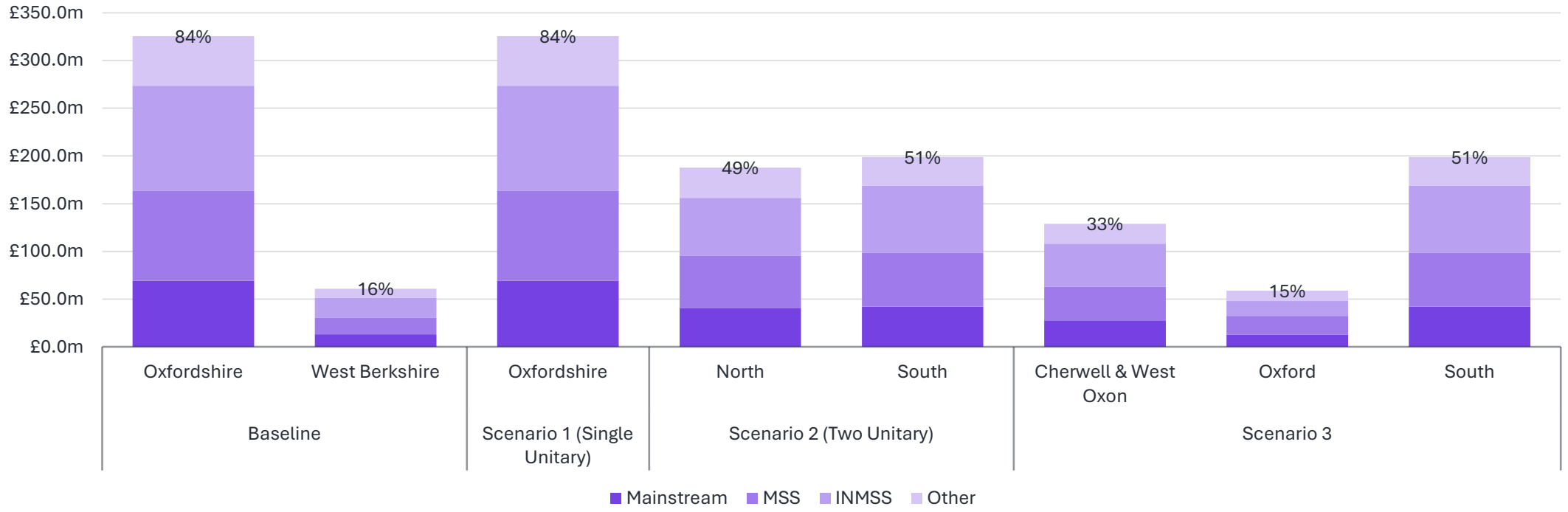
SEND DEFICIT DISTRIBUTION

By March 2028, Oxfordshire's high needs deficit is forecast to rise to £187m. This SEND deficit position may fall to the proposed new unitary authorities on vesting day. It is undecided how this deficit may be split and is likely to involve a financial settlement based on the assets and future income of the new unitary authorities.

The contribution from each of the new unitary authorities has been estimated by calculating the cumulative spend on EHCPs over the past 3 years. This shows the proportion of spend that would have come from each of the proposed unitary authorities and therefore their estimated contribution to the deficit.

Note this analysis has not considered the different deficit positions of neighbouring unitary authorities along with how the DSG budget has been managed.

Cumulative spend on EHCPS over past 3 years



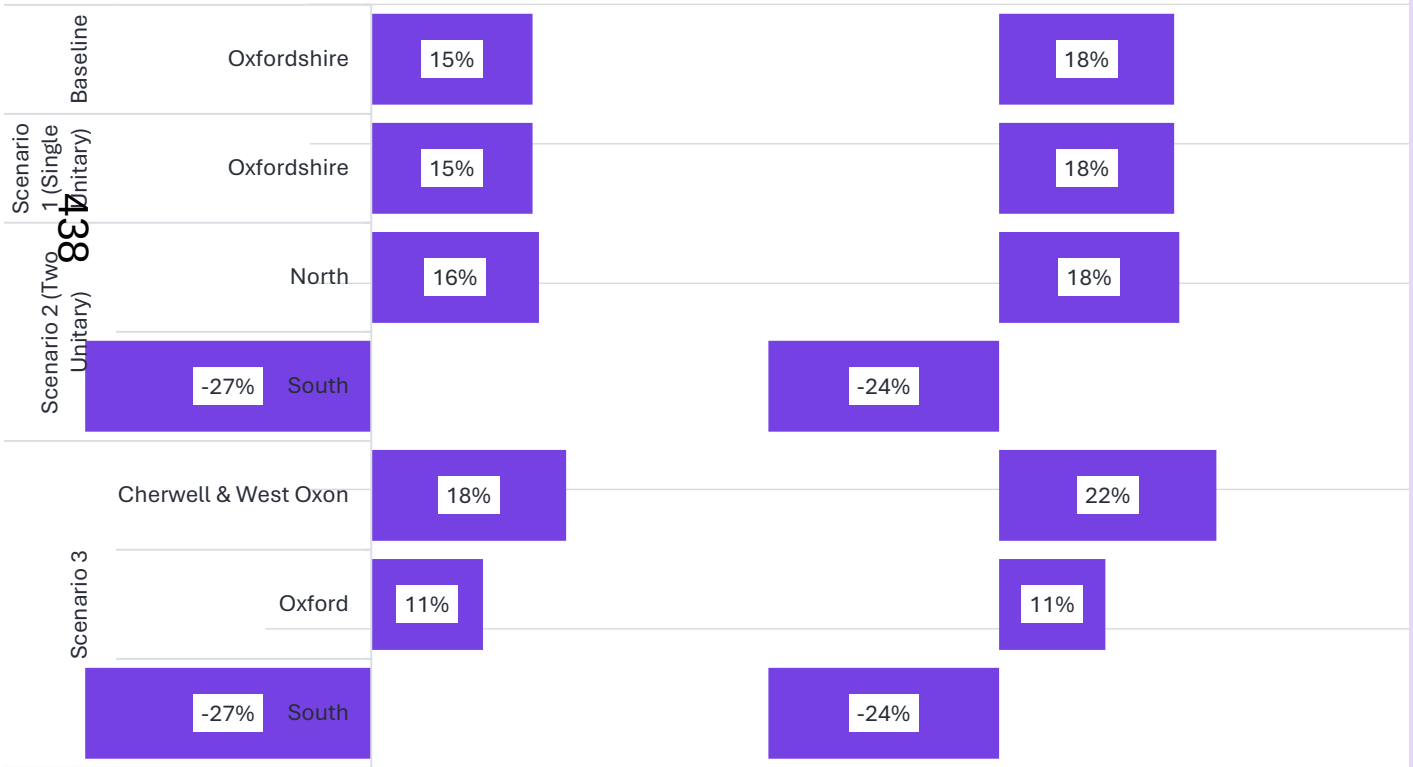
Education: Demand forecasting

PLACEMENT DEMAND AND CAPACITY

The below graphs show the school capacity compared to the projected school age population. This shows the demand vs capacity for schools in each of the proposed unitary authorities.

Note if neighbouring unitary data has not been provided (West Berkshire), the capacity from schools within these has not been included.

2025 school capacity deficit



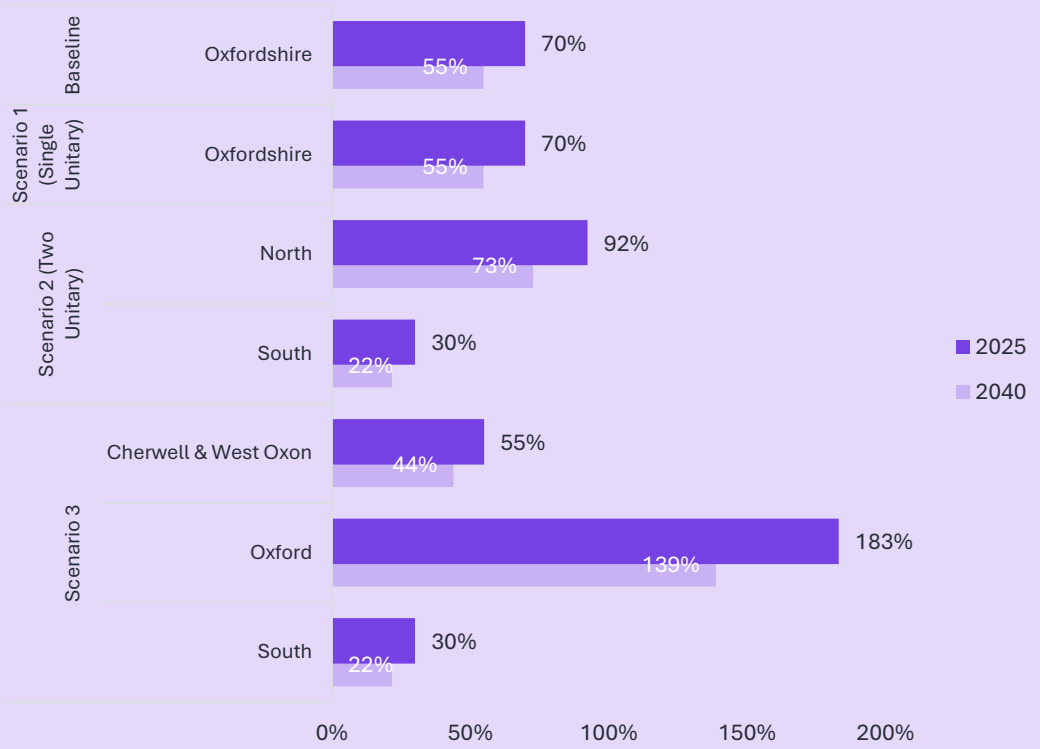
2040 school capacity deficit

MSS capacity

This graph shows the percentage of children in maintained special schools (MSS) and independent non maintained special schools (INMSS) that can be supported in local authority owned special schools.

Where there is a lower percentage, this indicates that a lower proportion of young people can be supported in maintained special schools. This likely means that there will be a greater use of INMSS placements.

MSS capacity



Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. 2025 school's capacity held constant. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Education: SEND costs

SERVICE COST SUMMARY

The predicted spend for each scenario is included in the table below alongside the expected service cost in 2025 and 2040. Note this is a general model designed to allow comparisons between proposed scenarios and is not a financial forecast for budgeting purposes.

In general, there is an increase in combined service cost for scenarios with more authorities. This is driven by higher combined staffing overheads due to having more authorities and therefore leadership teams. Note, the model only accounts for the additional uplift in staffing costs for delivery teams and there is an expected additional increase from other teams, such as IT or legal teams, that have not been modelled in this analysis. In this case, SEND staffing costs were not provided so the total cost is consistent across scenarios.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Predicted spend for scenario 2025	SEND service cost 2025 (gross placements cost + staffing)	Predicted spend for scenario 2040	SEND service cost 2040 (gross placements cost + staffing)
Baseline	Oxfordshire	£151.6m	£168m	£453.0m	£374m
	West Berkshire		£29m		£79m
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	£120.2m	£168m	£374.2m	£374m
Scenario 2	North	£151.6m	£90m	£453.0m	£203m
	South		£107m		£250m
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	£155.5m	£66m	£453.0m	£144m
	Oxford		£24m		£59m
	South		£107m		£250m

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council provided cost data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

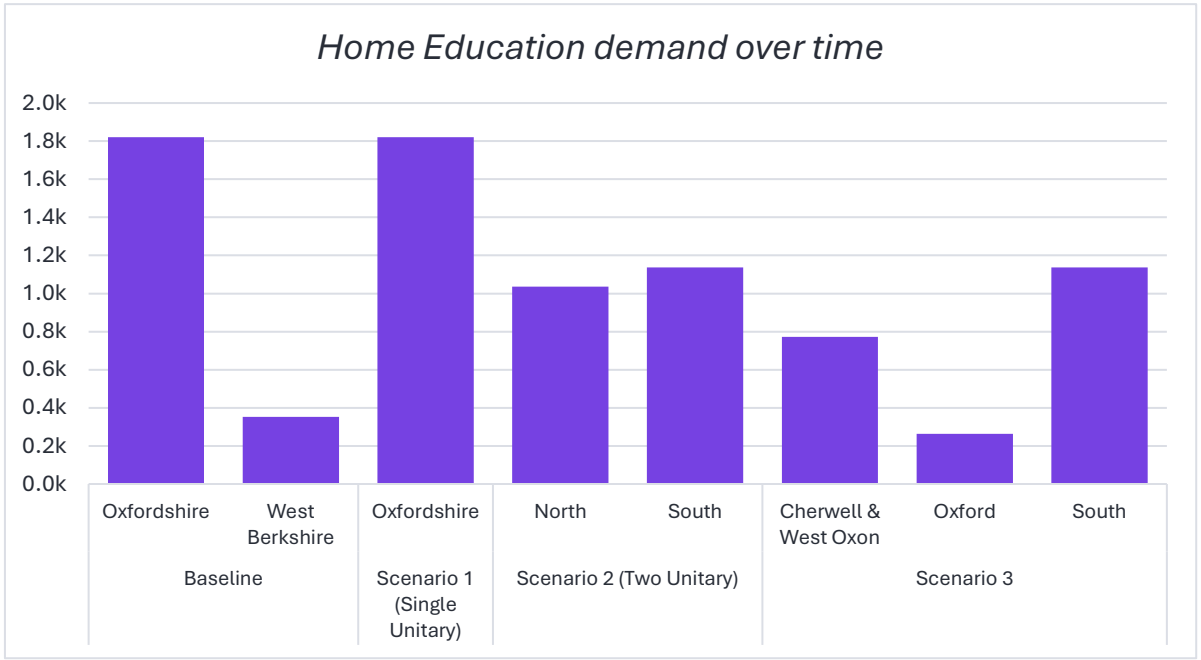
Education: Home education

DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING

The following slides show the expected home education, school exclusion, school absences and Children Missing Education (where data was available) in 2025, 2030 and 2040. The expected demand is driven by population forecasts in each new unitary.

The graph on the left shows total demand in 2025, 2030 and 2040, in general this is proportional to population in the new unitary authorities. This analysis will show the expected change in demand in each unitary.

The table to the right of each graph shows the prevalence per 10,000 school aged population, this remains consistent over time.



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Home Education Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	180
	West Berkshire	144
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	180
Scenario 2	North	179
	South	168
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	199
	Oxford	139
	South	168

Note, for home education the data available shows prevalence increasing. However, both council data and nationally available data was only available for post covid years, and it is unclear if this trend will continue or flatten out. Therefore, only demand for 2025 has been shown. Nationally available data has been taken for PCC prevalences.

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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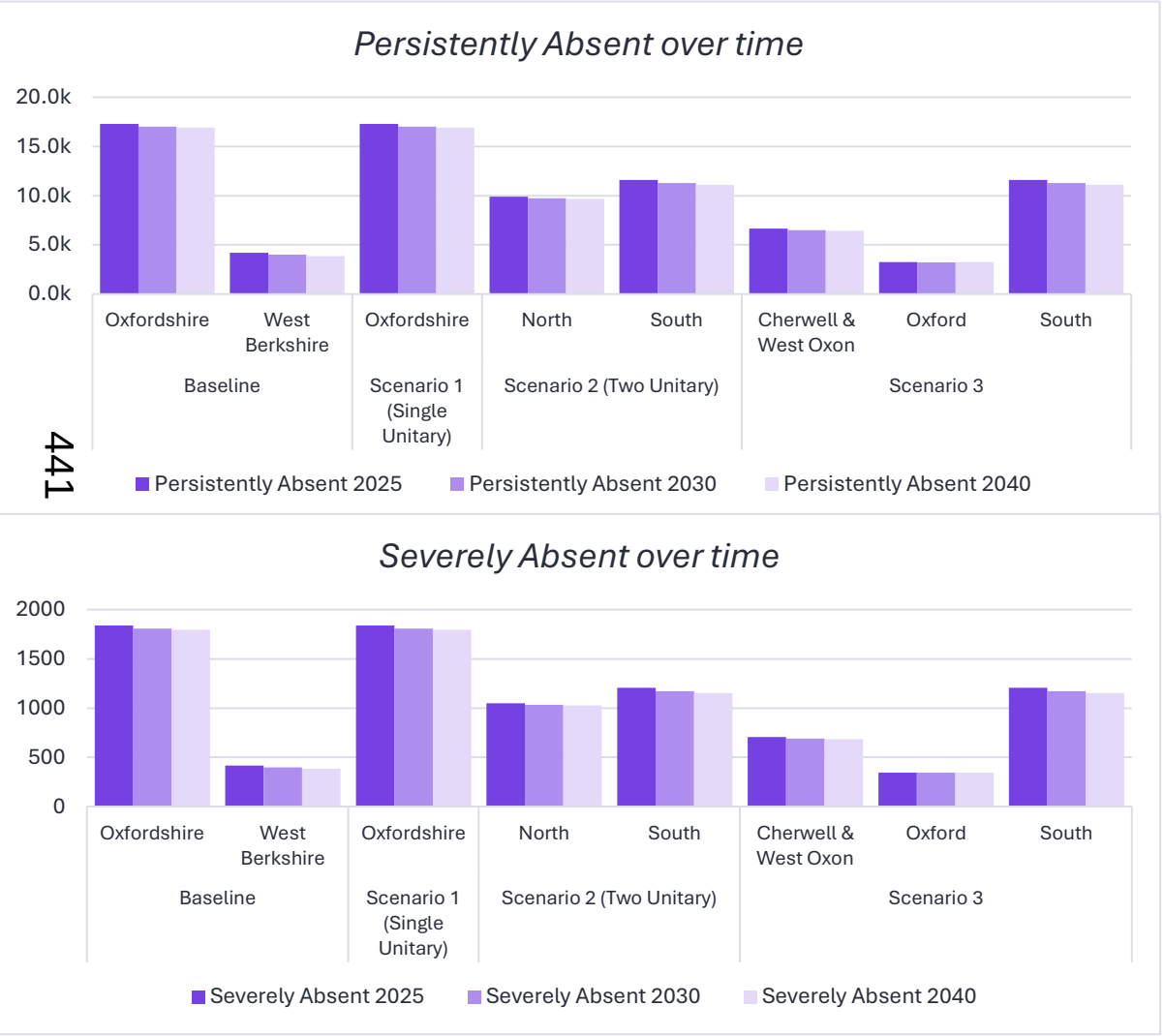
Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k school aged population.

Education: Absences and Exclusions

DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Persistently Absent Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	1712
	West Berkshire	1714
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	1712
Scenario 2	North	1712
	South	1713
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	1712
	Oxford	1713
	South	1713

Scenario	Proposed Authority	Severely Absent Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	182
	West Berkshire	171
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	182
Scenario 2	North	182
	South	178
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	182
	Oxford	182
	South	178

National data has additionally been used in all cases within this section for both Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

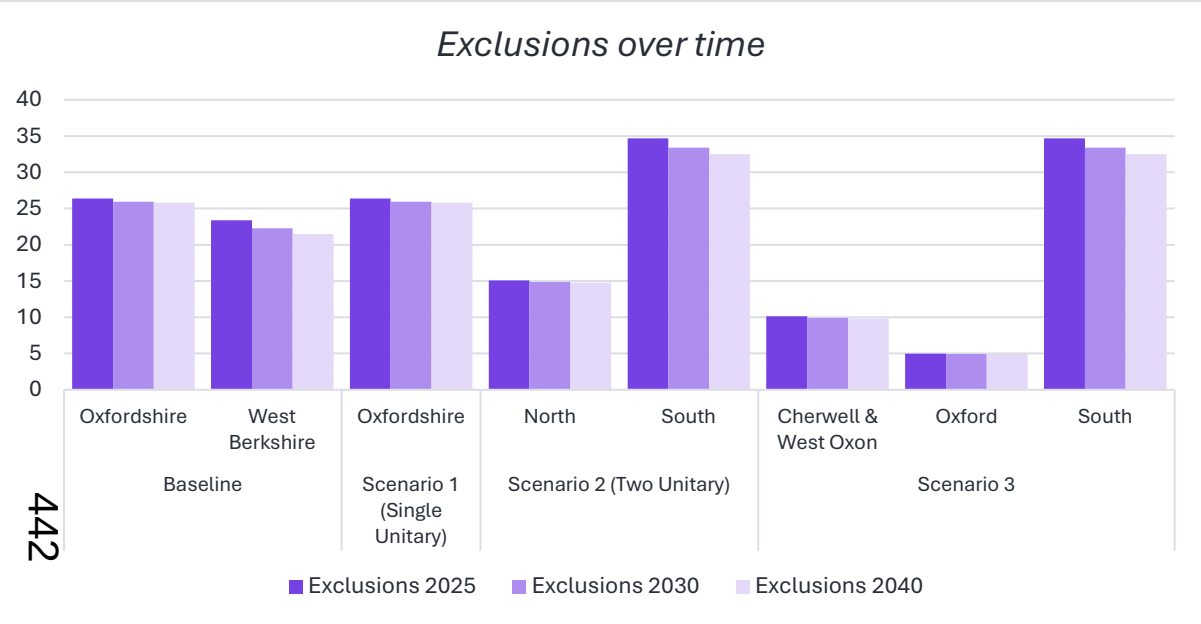
Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data, nationally available data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k school aged population.

Education: Absences and Exclusions

DEMAND VARIATION AND FORECASTING



Scenario	Proposed Authority	Exclusions Prevalence
Baseline	Oxfordshire	3
	West Berkshire	10
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	3
Scenario 2	North	3
	South	5
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	3
	Oxford	3
	South	5

Data: ONS population forecasts and estimates, council data
Assumptions: Population growth matched to ONS growth rates, ONS projections, or aligned to linear regression model of population growth as appropriate. Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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Prevalence remains consistent. Prevalence is shown per 10k school aged population.

Section 2d: Housing

The scope of this section is to provide insight into the likely impacts of each proposed scenario on homelessness demand.

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Homelessness: Households owed a duty

DEMAND FOR HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT FOR 2025 HAS BEEN MODELLED

This analysis has modelled the demand for homelessness support for 2025. This analysis shows the variation in 2025 demand for homelessness support based on what duty is required. This will identify if certain scenarios are creating unitary authorities that have a high demand variation in 2025 as well as an increased demand to baseline scenario. This is shown both as a % of total households in that scenario and a total number of households.

Scenario	Proposed Authority	% of total households assessed as owed a prevention duty	% of total households assessed as owed a relief duty	% of total households assessed as owed a main duty*	Number of households assessed as owed a duty
Baseline	Oxfordshire	0.6%	0.3%	0.1%	1726 / 856 / 306
	West Berkshire	0.3%	0.5%	0.1%	207 / 304 / 35
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	0.6%	0.3%	0.1%	1726 / 856 / 306
Scenario 2	North	0.5%	0.4%	0.1%	829 / 714 / 211
	South	0.6%	0.2%	0.1%	1104 / 447 / 131
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	511 / 299 / 142
	Oxford	0.6%	0.8%	0.1%	318 / 415 / 69
	South	0.6%	0.2%	0.1%	1104 / 447 / 131

Prevention Duty owed
Relief Duty owed
Main Duty owed

**Main duty is households assessed, following relief duty end, as unintentionally homeless and priority need. Therefore, there may be cases of a household included in both relief and main duty count*

Data: HCLIC data from gov.uk
Assumptions: Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

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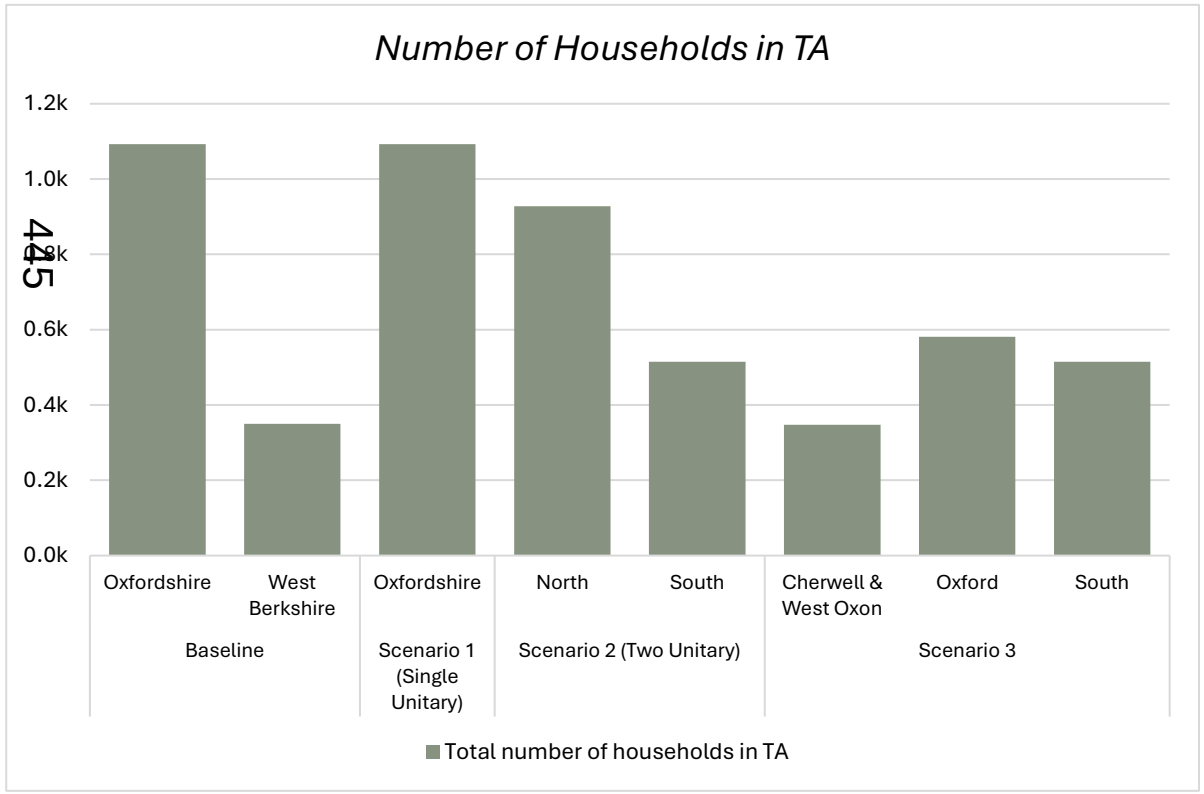
Homelessness: Temporary accommodation

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION DEMAND FOR 2025 HAS BEEN MODELLED

This analysis has modelled the demand for temporary accommodation for 2025. This analysis shows the variation in temporary accommodation support and will identify if certain scenarios are creating high variation in demand between unitary authorities as well as an increase in demand to baseline.

The graph on the left shows number of households needing temporary accommodation and the table on the right shows the prevalence of this as a % of total households in the unitary.



Scenario	Proposed Authority	% of households in TA
Baseline	Oxfordshire	0.4%
	West Berkshire	0.5%
Scenario 1	Oxfordshire	0.4%
Scenario 2	North	0.5%
	South	0.3%
Scenario 3	Cherwell & West Oxon	0.3%
	Oxford	1.1%
	South	0.3%

Data: HCLIC data from gov.uk
Assumptions: Detail included in methodology section of the appendix.

Homelessness: Historic trends

DEMAND FOR HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT IS EXPECTED TO INCREASE

The limitations of the nationally available data along with the changing trends in homelessness means the future homelessness demand can not be modelled accurately. However, the "2025" analysis provides a view of how both the number of households facing homelessness and the number of households in temporary accommodation will split amongst the proposed unitary authorities.

Historic trends:

There has been an increase in the number of households seeking help from local authorities for support with homelessness. This has been driven by the impact of recent economic and policy developments.

- Temporary accommodation: There has been a rise in temporary accommodation placements, particularly Bed and Breakfast hotel placements.
- First-Time Homelessness: More people are experiencing homelessness for the first time.
- Housing Cost Burden: Rising housing costs and lack of affordable housing are major drivers of homelessness. There are now more renter households paying over 50% of their income on rent.

Future demand:

It is expected that the number of households requiring local authority support for housing and homelessness prevention will continue to increase. However, there are policy changes that are due to impact this. For example, the Renters (Reform) Bill will have an impact on homelessness legislation, with the government planning to make relevant changes to the homelessness legislation to align with the reforms brought forward by this bill.

Appendix I: Methodology

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Appendix I (a): Data

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Data

THE MODEL HAS BEEN INPUTTED WITH DATA PROVIDED BY THE COUNCIL

As part of this work data was requested from councils . This data is outlined below and is the foundation for the analysis in the report:

Area	Data requested

ASC	• Number of clients accessing long term support at year end split by working age Adult and Older Adult. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	  • Where possible this data has been provided by originating address and placement address
	• Number of requests for support year end split by working age Adult and Older Adult. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	• Number of requests for support resulting in a service year end split by working age Adult and Older Adult. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	• Average unit cost for each provision split by working age Adult and Older Adult. This was requested for the last 3 financial years, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	  • Both gross and net costs were requested.
	  • Where possible this data has been provided by originating address and placement address
	• Capacity of Residential Care and Nursing Care provisions
	• FTE and pay by team for staff involved in delivering Adult Social Care

CSC	• Number of Children in Care by provision at year end. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	  • Where possible this data has been provided by originating address and placement address
	• Number of child protection pans and Child in need plans at year end. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	• Number of new in year referrals. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	• Number of new in year Social Care assessments. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	• Number of early help interventions. Provided as a snapshot at financial year end, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	• Average unit cost for each provision. This was requested for the last 3 financial years, 21/22, 22/23, 23/24
	  • Both gross and net costs were requested
	  • Where possible this data has been provided by originating address and placement address
	• Capacity of internal fostering placements
	• FTE and pay by team for staff involved in delivering Children's Social Care

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Data

THE MODEL HAS BEEN INPUTTED WITH DATA PROVIDED BY THE COUNCIL

As part of this work data was requested from councils . This data is outlined below and is the foundation for the analysis in the report:

Area	Data requested
SEND	• Number of total EHCPs by provision type. Snapshot at the SEN2 data return date. For 2022. 2023 and 2024 • Number of new in year EHCPs by provision type. For 2022. 2023 and 2024 • Average cost of EHCPs by provision type • Capacity of Maintained Special Schools • FTE and pay by team for staff involved in delivering SEND support
Education	• Total capacity of school places • Number of young people receiving home to school transport by type for the last three financial years, 21/22, 22/23 and 23/24 • Average cost of home to school transport by type for the last three financial years, 21/22, 22/23 and 23/24 • Number of young people missing or absent from school for the last 3 financial years • Number of young people receiving elective home education for the last 3 financial years

Appendix I (b): Demand Modelling methodology

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Demand Modelling: High Level Approach

POPULATION AND PREVALENCE

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To model how we expect demand to vary by geography and change over time we have segmented the population. This will both enable us to provide forecasts for new geographical footprints, and control for the impact of deprivation and population density in our forecasting.

When we look to the features that have the biggest impact on Social Care demand for a population, we see that these are age and deprivation. In the model, we have segmented our population by age and used the smallest practical geography to control for deprivation.

Smaller geography = more accurate.

For each segment (i.e. U18 in MSOA x) of the population we can say:

Segment Demand = Segment Population x Segment Prevalence

Through making a series of sensible assumptions on how we expect the prevalence and population to change within a segment we can forecast our expected demand in that segment.

Population modelling

APPROACH TO PROJECTING POPULATIONS

Segment demand = Segment population x Segment prevalence

- To model population, we are using the following datasets:
  1. **Forecasts:** ONS population projections (at a District level) (2018)
  2. **Historical trends:** ONS population estimates (at an MSOA level (2023))
  3. **Analysis:** Combining population projections with population estimates

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- Where they exist, we will use ONS population projections, however:
  - Looking at ONS Projections vs ONS Estimates and analysed the discrepancy at a district level. Where there is a significant delta, we have applied a simple model based on historic trends and added in a damper as we project forward
- To get MSOA % population of a LA, we used historic proportions with some trend adjustments where needed
- To get age group projections, we have used historic MSOA distributions
- To reflect a projected increase in OA, we have scaled up the proportion of 65+ to match ONS national projections, whilst scaling down the 0-17 age group to reflect a declining birth rate

Prevalence modelling

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PREVALENCE

Segment demand = Segment population x Segment prevalence

Prevalence formula

$$\text{Segment Prevalence} = \frac{\sum \text{Actual demand in segment}}{\sum \text{Actual segment population}}$$

from your returns

based on ONS population mid-year actuals, as detailed previously

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Worked example

Historical average prevalence

$$\text{Children in Care average prevalence} = \frac{\text{Known number of Children in Care}}{\text{Known U18 population in wonderland}} = \frac{\text{2022 = 5, 2023 = 10, 2024 = 7}}{\text{2022 = 4,568, 2023 = 4,762, 2024 = 4,823}} = \frac{23}{14{,}153} = \text{16.25 CIC/10k U18}$$

Demand Modelling: Handling of unknown values and Out of County data

APPROACH TO UNKNOWNS WITHIN THE DATA RETURN

Segment demand = Segment population x Segment prevalence

To handle where values in data returns have been redacted, or where demand data has been given for districts / MSOAs which are 'Out of County', we have taken the following approach:

Redactions

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Where MSOA-level data returns are heavily suppressed, we have instead run the analysis using the district-level data return.

2. Where cost data is redacted, we have used the average cost of districts / MSOAs with data for that year.

3. Where we have no more detailed information, we have assumed 2.5.

Unknown and Out of County

Where 'unknown' locality data, UASC, or Out of County* data has been provided, we have redistributed this across districts / MSOAs within the current county.

For demand data, we spread out this demand across the current county through weighting against the relevant population segment (e.g. U18s for Childrens). This is essentially a likelihood that the unknown demand came from a certain district / MSOA within the county.

To account for the fact that Out of County placements may differ in cost to in-county placements, where cost data is provided, we have then back-worked the average unit cost for each demand type per district / MSOA. This ensures total forecasted costs remain accurate & constant pre and post value re-distribution.

Unit costs at a district level may appear greater than that provided in the data return, if the cost data provided for Out of County / Unknown placements are greater than in-county, to account for the greater cost of Out of County placements.

Appendix I (c): Adults & Children's Social Care and SEND methodology

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Approach to projecting prevalence forward, with time

HOW ARE WE MODELLING CHANGES IN PREVALENCE OVER TIME

Segment demand = Segment population x Segment prevalence

Introduction

Adults and Children's Social Care

To project prevalence going forward, for ASC and CSC, we have calculated the average prevalence from actuals, for the period FY21/22 through FY23/24, and applied the same prevalence going forward. These years were chosen to (1) avoid influence from COVID-19 and (2) as longer-term data is rarely available, for the same set of districts, utilising the same methodology.

For ASC, in the longer term, we have then proportionally modelled a prevalence trend back towards originating demand, discussed on the next slide.

SEND

As the prevalence of SEND has greatly increased over the past few years, we have modelled a linear increase for type of SEND setting type for each district / MSOA. Where there was not a clear linear increase, the average prevalence was used instead.

The SEND prevalence for each setting type is 'frozen' at the year that the total SEND prevalence across setting types reaches 5.5% of the under 24 population segment. Any years afterwards will have this fixed prevalence.

Other aspects of the report (Home to School transport, Absences and Exclusions etc.)

Our approach to modelling other sections of the report are detailed further into this methodology appendix.

Population segments used

These are used for both prevalence calculations, and for the weighted redistribution of unknown data.

Cohort	Population segment used
ASC: Older Adults	65+
ASC: Working Age Adults	18 – 65
Children's Social Care	Under 18
SEND (and Home to School transport)	Under 25

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Approach to projecting prevalence forward, with time

PLACEMENT VS ORIGINATING PREVALENCE

We know that we have more placements in some parts of the county than others relative to local demand. As a result, we place service users in areas of the county that are not the same as their originating address. **This means that our data currently shows an artificially distorted view of need across the county**. As our population tends to its "natural" demographics we would expect this distortion to unwind over time and social care need to equalise across geographies. This phenomenon will only impact "placement" based services (e.g. Residential Care), and not community services (e.g. domestic care).

For each service, we produced cost and demand analysis for 2 key scenarios:

Service	2025 prevalence	Long term population driven prevalence (2030 and 2040)
Childrens: Children in Care 458	We have assumed that this placements will be distributed with respect to their **originating address**, not the placement address.	**No change in prevalence:** we will perform the analysis based on the child's originating / parental address, which will not change as a result of the location of the child's placement.
Adult: Residential Care, Nursing Care and Supported Living placements	Using known demand and cost data for each placement, provide a forecast for each district based on service users **currently placed in that locality.** These forecasts will have demographic distortions baked in as we do not expect services users to be moved due to changes in boundaries.	Our long-term population driven prevalence forecast will be shaped towards the distribution of service users by originating address where known. As the population across the county tends to its natural demographics, we expect the prevalence of Nursing Care and Residential Care placements to tend to the same distribution between districts as Nursing Care and Residential Care demand by origin. Where this data is unavailable, we will use the prevalence rate of domestic care (as this service does not result in service users changing address). For the longer term forecasts we will use a prevalence rate that is distributed in this way.
Adult: Other care types	For Other care types, or where placement information is not available, the forecast for each district will be based on the service user's originating address.	**No change in prevalence:** we will perform the analysis based on the service user's **originating address.**

Assumptions
LENGTH OF STAY

In the longer term, we expect the prevalence to trend back towards the distribution of prevalence suggested from originating data (or where unavailable, domestic care demand).

For longer term forecasts (2030 and 2040), and for three types of placement care – Nursing Care, Residential Care and Supported Living, we have therefore blended the prevalences between placement prevalence and originating prevalence with the weightings on the right.

Trend towards originating prevalence over the long term

Age group (WAA or OA)	Type of care	Year	Weighting
OA	Nursing	2030	30%
		2040	0%
	Residential	2030	20%
		2040	0%
	Supported Living	2030	20%
		2040	0%
WAA	Nursing	2030	80%
		2040	50%
	Residential	2030	80%
		2040	50%
	Supported Living	2030	80%
		2040	50%

ASC, CSC and SEND demand modelling
SUMMARY TABLE

Cohort	Assumptions for 2025	Assumptions for 2030 & 2040 (where this differs)	Handling of neighbouring unitaries
Older Adult	• For 2025 only, prevalence remains the same as past average per district / MSOA, based on placement address • For OP, use population 65+ for prevalence and population forecasts • Practice is consistent across current LA footprints	• For residential-type settings, assume "natural" demographic demand is proportionally spread as per originating address where available or as per dom care between districts / MSOAs. • For OA: Assume average placement duration of 2 years.	**Where demand & cost data has been provided for neighbouring unitaries:** • Where this includes demand originating in that neighbouring unitary, we have used that demand to calculate the prevalences in the districts / MSOAs of the neighbouring unitary. **Where this data has not been provided:** • If this data is unavailable or the data only shows current placements in that neighbouring unitary (but not demand originating within that neighbouring unitarity), we have instead used the average prevalence from districts / MSOAs currently within the local authority. • This is to avoid demand appearing lower in scenarios with neighbouring unitaries.
Working Age Adult	• For 2025 only, prevalence remains the same as past average per district / MSOA, based on placement address • For WAA, use population 18-65+ for prevalence and population forecasts • Practice is consistent across current LA footprints	• For residential-type settings, assume "natural" demographic demand is proportionally spread as per originating address where available or as per dom care between districts / MSOAs. • For WAA: Assume average placement duration of 15 years.	
Children's	• For 2025 and 2030 & 2040, prevalence remains the same as past average per district / MSOA • Use U18 population • Assumed that spend will be divided by originating address rather than placement address, therefore analysis completed based on parents' address (not placement address) • Practice is consistent across current LA footprints		
SEND	• Prevalence is calculated from U25 population and will increase over time as per the trend in the district / MSOA over the past 3 years. This increase is included in 2025 projections. • We have used a linear regression model, capped at 5.5% of population. If this resulted in negative or no linear forecast, we have instead assumed that the prevalence will stay the same over time. • Breakdown by setting in same proportions as the average over the time period data is available for.		**Where this data has been provided** • Similarly, we have used this data without modifications. **Where this data has not been provided** • We have used the total number of EHCPs from the national Government SEND report [1]. This is at LA level, so the prevalence for all MSOAs within an LA where national data has been used will have the same starting prevalence. • To split this by SEND provision type, we have then applied the same average %

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Appendix I (d): Home to School Transport, Education and Homelessness forecast methodology

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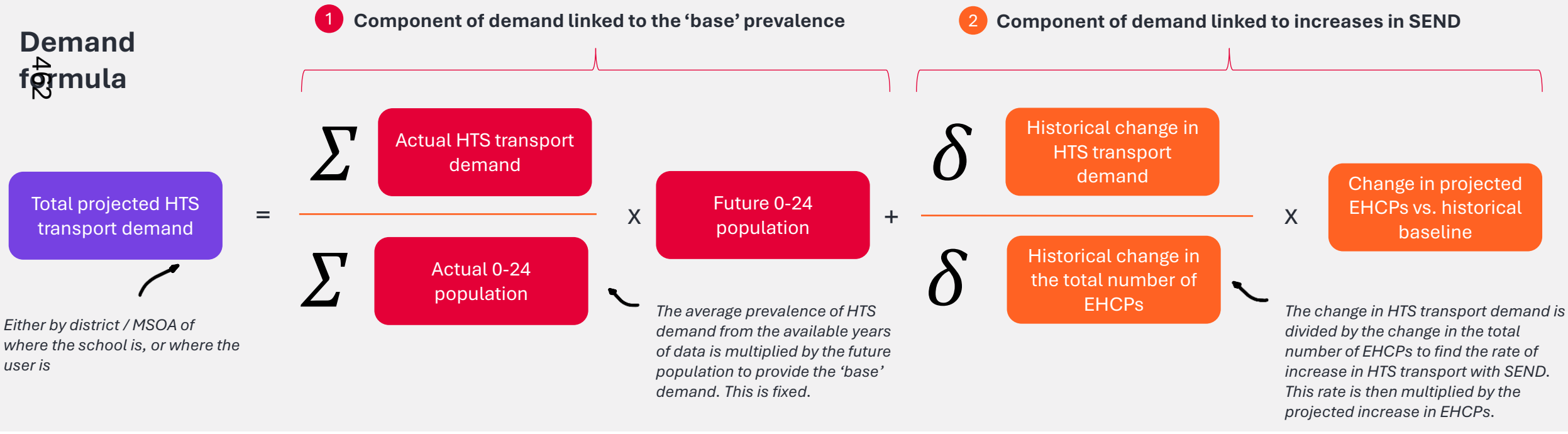
Home to School Transport (HTS)
FORECASTING METHODOLOGY

Our modelling for Home to School (HTS) transport demand is designed to reflect that HTS transport demand is driven by both demand from children and young people (CYP) with SEND but also CYP without SEND. As the total number of CYP with EHCPs is increasing, we would expect HTS transport demand to increase, but not at the same rate.

The formula therefore has two components: one linked to the average base prevalence, with the same approach as detailed for ASC and CSC demand; and a second component that reflects the increase driven by the increasing number of CYP with EHCPs.

For neighbouring unitaries without data, we have assumed the same average prevalence and split of transport type as areas where we do have data.

Demand formula



Education

FORECASTING METHODOLOGY FOR ABSENCES, EXCLUSIONS AND HOME EDUCATION

Data inputs

In all cases, where data was available in the data return, this was used.

Where data was unavailable (for example, for neighbouring unitaries without data), national data was used for that district.

National data is only available at the UTLA level, and as such where national data was used, the same prevalence will be applied to all districts / MSOAs within a UTLA.

Metric	National data source used	Years used
Persistent absences	Pupil absence in schools in England [1]	Academic years 2021, 2022, 2023
Severe absences		
Exclusions	Suspensions and permanent exclusions in England [2]	Academic years 2021 and 2022. 2023 data currently un-available.
Elective Home Education (EHE)	Elective home education – at any point during the previous academic year [3]	Academic year 2023/24 used to reflect latest trends.
Children Missing Education*	** CME was only included if complete information was supplied in the data return for all districts / MSOAs within the scenarios. Where CME data was missing for neighbouring unitaries, this was excluded from the outputs.*	

Demand calculation

Demand formula (example)
Absences

$$\text{Projected absences} = \text{Future 5-16 population} \times \frac{\sum \text{Actual absences}}{\sum \text{5 – 16 population}}$$

For absences, exclusions and EHE, an average prevalence is calculated from either the available years of data (if using the data return) or from the 'years used' in the table on the left (if using national data).

Analysis of national data shows that the rates of school absences and exclusions are higher than the pre-COVID average.

By taking an average prevalence from the immediate years available for both 2025 and longer-term forecasts, our projection will be more accurate in the short term.

This approach does not assume that the rates of absences and exclusions will return to their pre-COVID baseline.

EHE was only projected for 2025, as national data is only available from 2021, and we are unsure if the post-COVID rise in EHE will continue.

Data limitations

Where data is available by home address, this will be used. This is preferable as we are calculating the prevalence against the school age population of each area. However, national data looks to only be available by school location.

Effect of calculating absences and exclusions by school location

1. **CYP goes to school in same area**

No issues with calculating prevalence by the MSOA's SAP.

2. **CYP goes to school in a different district / MSOA**

Prevalence may be overstated in areas with more schools and undercounted in areas with fewer schools. Impact: Changes in UA could overstate or understate the number of missing/absent students between scenarios.

3. **CYP goes to a school Out of County**

UAs which largely educates pupils whose home authority is elsewhere will have the number of absences / exclusions overstated.

Housing and homelessness
FORECASTING METHODOLOGY

Data inputs

Metric	National data source used
Household size actuals & projections	Household projections for England: 2018-based [1]
Households assessed as owed a duty	Statutory homelessness in England, 2023 [2]
Number of households in temporary accommodation	

Assumptions

We have assimilated data across the previous 4 quarters of data available. Where data was missing for a council in a quarter, we have applied the average across the remaining quarters.

The national data on homelessness is only available at a LA level. At an MSOA level, we have assumed that all MSOAs within an LA will have the same prevalence. Scenarios where current LAs are split will therefore be an approximation.

Similarly, household size projections produced by the ONS are also at an LA level. We have therefore assumed the household size is constant for all MSOAs within a local authority, which we know to be a broad assumption. We have accepted this approximation, as the national data on homelessness is also limited at an LA level.

Methodology

As we have adjusted our population projections, we have applied the 2018 household sizes to our adjusted population projections, to calculate the projected number of households.

Household size formula

i.e. the projected household size

$$\text{\# of households in a given area} = \text{Adjusted population projection} \times \frac{\text{ONS forecast \# households}}{\text{ONS forecast total population}}$$

This is then used as the basis on which prevalence is calculated.

Demand formula

$$\text{Households owed a given duty} = \text{Future \# of households} \times \frac{\sum \text{Historical households owed a given duty}}{\sum \text{Historical \# of households}}$$

What we aren't forecasting and why

1. **Costs of temporary accommodation**

No reliable data available without requesting data returns.

2. **Exact placement splits beyond temporary accommodation**

This would require looking into the local social housing supply locations to ascertain how this would be split between proposed UAs, as well as added complexities where councils are sending residents out of county.

3. **2030 & beyond**

Due to the rapidly changing policy space (renter's reform, housebuilding), we are only providing 2025 estimates.

Appendix I (e): Cost Modelling

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Cost Modelling
SERVICE COST

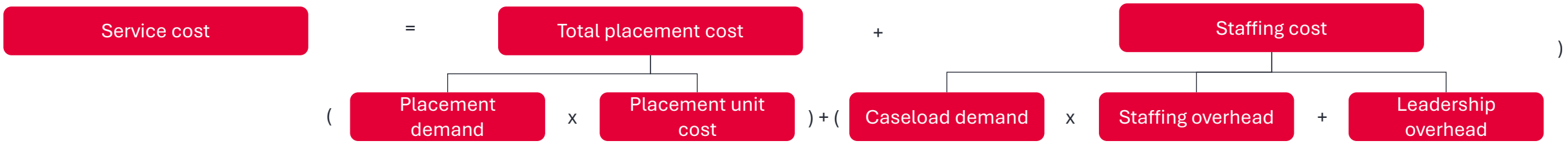
Our cost analysis has been limited to assessing the impact of LGR on two key drivers of spend:

1. **Provision** costs: the cost of placements, homecare, and supporting SEN provision.
2. The **staffing** cost associated with identifying need and supporting residents.

Where we have sufficiently granular data this extends to:

Service	Description	Services in scope		
		Adult	**Childrens**	**Education**
Placements	Analysis on unit cost of placements and homecare. This will extend to estimating the impact of scale, population density, complexity, self funding, OOA placements, Inflation and equalisation of rates.	• Nursing • Residential • Domiciliary • Supported Living • "Other"	• Children in Care placements	• Mainstream School • MSS • IMSS • 'Other' • Home to School transport
Staffing	Analysis of the distribution of staffing spend across the proposed unitaries, and any anticipated changes in organisation structure.	• All Council Adult Social Care directorate staffing	• All Children's Social Care directorate staffing	• All Council Education directorate staffing

The overarching governing equation is:



Cost Modelling

UNIT COSTS

Service cost = Total placement cost + Staffing cost

(Placement demand x Placement unit cost) + (Caseload demand x Delivery team cost + Leadership overhead

In a similar manner to our demand modelling, we have used the same population segmentation approach to help us model costs across the county.

As part of the data return you have provided us with unit costs. We have then modelled cost at the same geographic level to help control for complexity (driven by deprivation etc.) and local cost variation (e.g. higher rents in urban areas).

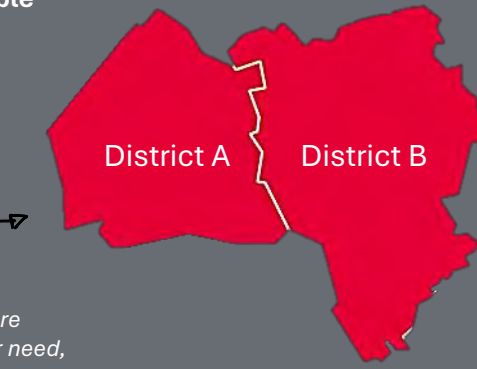
We have modelled unit cost by individual setting (i.e. OP Nursing) to ensure that we are comparing cases of comparable complexity so-far as is possible within non-PID data.

Placement demand is taken as per the approach discussed in the previous section.

To provide average rates over larger geographic areas we have used a demand weighted average. This average is also used where no data is available (for example, for neighbouring unitaries where we have not received data).

This means that if we forecast increasing need in an expensive area of the county, and a reduction in need in a less expensive area, the average unit cost would adjust to account for this.

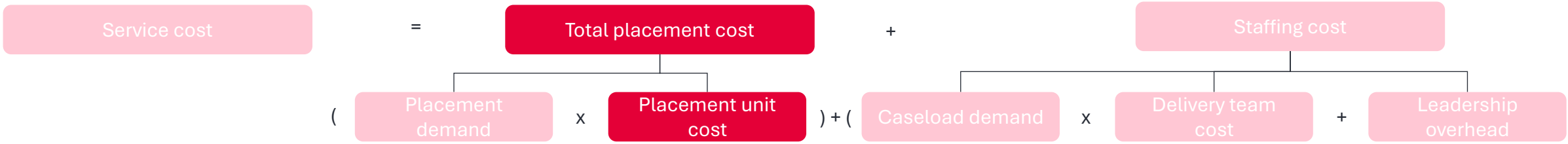
Worked example



	District A	District B	Total
2025	Population = 100 Prevalence = 1/10 Unit cost = £1000/wk	Population = 150 Prevalence = 1/20 Unit cost = £1500/wk	Population = 250 Prevalence = 1/14 Unit cost = £1214/wk
2040	Population = 110 Prevalence = 1/10 Unit cost = £1000/wk	Population = 300 Prevalence = 1/20 Unit cost = £1500/wk	Population = 410 Prevalence = 1/10 Unit cost = £1288/wk

Cost Modelling

UNIT COSTS



The unit cost is the cost of a setting placement, or providing a service such as Home to School transport for one service user. As we forecast unit cost forward, there are several factors that we have considered to assess the impact of LGR.

Factor	Hypothesis	How have we considered the impact of this?
Scale	That smaller authorities have less buying power and so will pay more for placements as they are outcompeted by larger LAs and the private market.	Using both national and individual data returns we will identify any correlation between unit cost and scale. If any strong trend is identified, we will apply an expected increase in unit cost rate as a result.
Population density	It is more expensive to deliver care in areas with lower population density due to increased travel time.	By modelling costs at a small geographic scale we control for these factors. As our underlying population changes (gets older, poorer or less dense) the aggregated cost will change to reflect this as we will have more service users with a higher average unit cost.
Complexity	More complex cases have a higher associated cost of care and our caseload is increasing.	
Self funding	Different areas of the county will have differing levels of self funders, which means that different unitary authorities will need to contribute differing percentages of the total cost of care.	
Out of area placements	We pay more to place service users outside an authority.	We have used out of county costs where these have been provided, and used an average cost where this is unavailable.
Inflation	Placement costs will increase in cost regardless of complexity or authority boundaries.	We have assumed compounding 3.328% inflation in line with 10 year CPI & average earnings index. When taking the average cost of a placement, we have also uplifted historical costs to account for inflation at a 5.81% rate.
Equalisation of care rates within a LA	Where an existing unitary authority is absorbing neighbouring MSOAs/districts and is paying a materially higher unit cost, and additional demand added to these contracts will be at this higher rate.	We are not expecting this to impact many scenarios, but will assume the unit cost of the existing unitary where this is higher.

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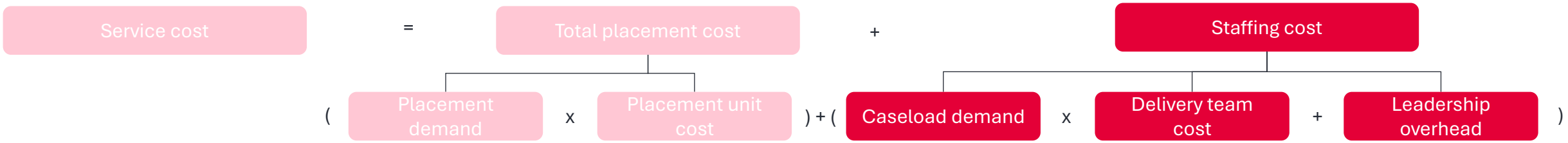
Cost Modelling

STAFFING COST



Through our analysis on staffing cost, we are looking to understand the following:

1. How will staffing requirements will vary across the proposed unitary authorities.
2. Where do we expect to see the cost of staffing change between different proposed models?
3. Where might existing organisational structures become unviable due to disaggregation of services?

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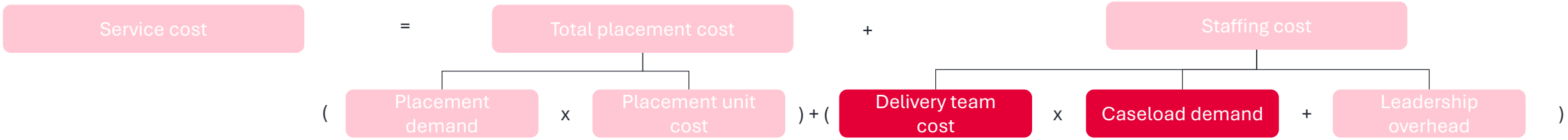
Our analysis has focused only on staff working directly on people services (e.g. transformation or data teams are excluded).

We have divided the workforce into 2 key groups:

- **Delivery team:** Staff that scale with demand, this includes all staff up to “team manager” level (up to c. £70k/annum/FTE).
- **Senior leadership**: Staff at Director level or their direct reports (over c. £70k/annum/FTE). These roles are required for every organisation regardless of caseload size.

Cost Modelling

STAFFING COSTS (DELIVERY TEAM)



Staffing costs that scale with demand

Most staffing cost scales with the number of service users that we serve. We can therefore use a delivery team overhead per service user to attribute this spend to unitary authorities based on expected demand both in 2025, and using our 2030 / 2040 forecasts.

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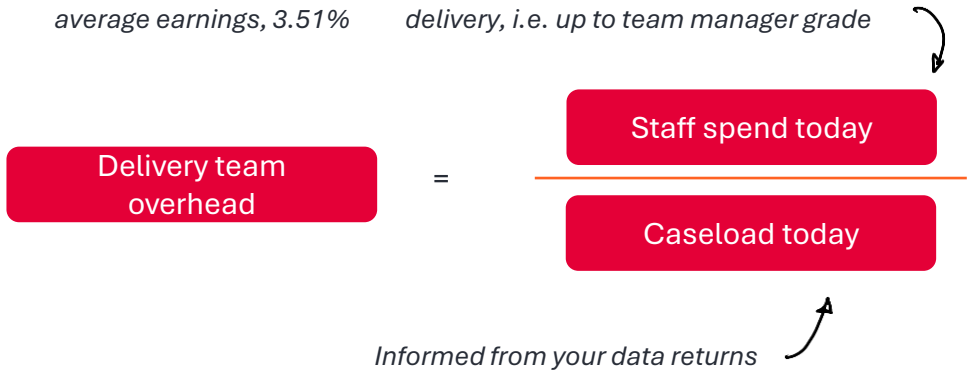
Assumed to rise with average earnings, 3.51%

Includes only staff that scale with service delivery, i.e. up to team manager grade



Caseload demand is used as a proxy to understand how our total staffing costs will change with time and be distributed between proposed LAs. Because we are most interested in changes to caseload and we are using a consistent definition of this demand for both the future state and demand today, it does not matter if this demand fails to capture all work performed by a team.

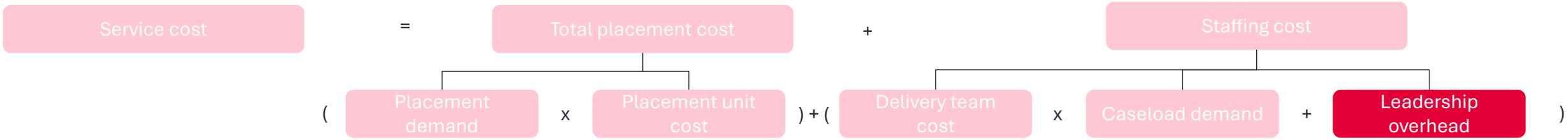
Following feedback, we have modelled caseload demand to include:

Service	Caseload demand metric
Adult	All care types returned in the data return, excluding requests for support & fulfilled requests for support
Children's	All placement types returned in the data return, excluding referrals and assessments
SEND	EHCP demand

We have chosen this metric as it more accurately captures a consistent baseline. Whilst we understand that assessments, and handling requests for support do form part of a delivery team's caseload, this is not meant to be a direct caseload measurement, but a proxy to use. As we are keeping the same caseload proxy measurement in the calculation of the future staffing cost, this remains consistent.

Cost Modelling

STAFFING COSTS (SENIOR LEADERSHIP)



Senior leadership

Whilst these staff might make up a relatively small proportion of the number of employees in an organisation, due to higher salaries they make up a disproportionate percentage of current staffing spend. For scenarios whereby total demand on an organisation is smaller, this leadership overhead can make up a significant proportion of spend.

We have assumed that director level leadership team for each directorate is fixed in its scale, and that by increasing the number of authorities in a geography we would need to duplicate this team across each service.

We have calculated the senior leadership team spend as a fixed overhead for the baseline scenario. We have then uplifted this by inflation, and scaled this by demand with a 50% weighting (e.g. a 50% reduction in demand would result in a 25% reduction in this cohort).

We have assumed senior leadership to include staff with salaries >£70k/ annum/FTE.

Step up factor
HYPOTHESIS AND RATIONALE

Hypothesis: *Smaller authorities have less buying power in the market, so all things being equal they pay more for the same provision.*

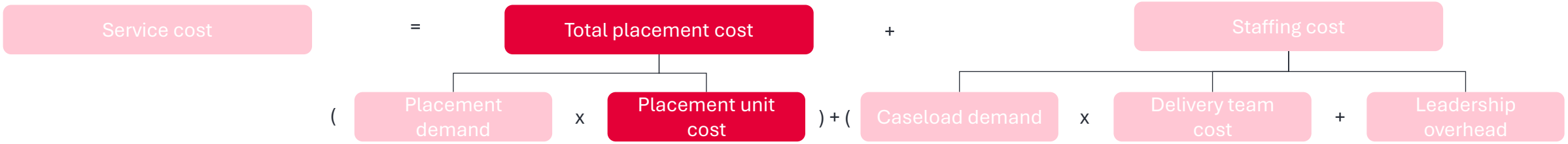
- As a response to feedback, we did some analysis to assess the impact of scale on unit cost.
- To do this, we focused on Older Adult Residential Care bed unit costs (as provided in the ASCFR data) – these are the most consistent setting, have the biggest population size and the data-set is most readily accessible nationally.
- We looked at the factors that best explain the difference in cost between authorities
    - Population size of relevant cohort (i.e. 65+) – ONS estimates 2023
    - Median income - Earnings and hours worked, place of residence by local authority: ASHE Table 8 2024
    - IMD – Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019
- We used a linear multivariable regression model to identify the trend in this dataset and found a statistically significant correlation between smaller authority population sizes and higher unit costs, in combination with these additional factors.
- As we know the population size, IMD and median income for each geography we could calculate the expected increase in cost by varying the population size, predicted IMD and predicted median income in the model compared to the baseline scenario.
- For each proposed authority we then calculated a relative cost factor that we could apply to each unitary to calculate the expected unit cost.
- For where neighbouring unitary data has been provided, the step-up factor has not been applied in the baseline case.
- This has been applied to Adult and Children's placement costs but not to SEND or Home to School Transport.

As we have Peterborough data we have calculated the step up factor accounting for the proportion of the population within the proposed new unitary authority that originates from Peterborough. This avoids double counting the impact of moving towards the demographics of Peterborough.

ASCFR data has been raised as not fully reflective of unit cost spend. However, this is the only available national data on this theme and is a relatively robust basis to develop a grounded approach to implementing this assumption.

Cost modelling

SUPPRESSION HANDLING



Where placement cost values in data returns have been redacted, we have taken the following approach to “filling in the blank”.

1. Where an average over a larger geographical area is known, we have set the missing value for all unknows to that average.

2. Where a total at a larger geographical area is not known, we have assumed a flat average of the known data.

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Appendix II: Data tables

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Data tables: Demand

WAA :

District	Nursing 2025	Nursing 2030	Nursing 2040	Residential 2025	Residential 2030	Residential 2040	Dom Care 2025	Dom Care 2030	Dom Care 2040	Supported living 2025	Supported living 2030	Supported living 2040	Other 2025	Other 2030	Other 2040
Cherwell	18	18	18	96	101	105	93	97	100	177	182	187	276	287	297
Oxford	18	19	20	102	109	116	114	119	123	115	117	119	212	221	229
South Oxfordshire	16	17	18	82	85	88	52	54	56	143	149	157	251	259	267
Vale of White Horse	15	15	16	91	94	97	116	123	130	156	169	183	247	262	278
West Berkshire	17	17	18	93	94	95	88	89	91	149	152	155	262	265	269
West Oxfordshire	15	16	16	69	71	71	57	60	63	122	127	130	240	251	263

OA :

District	Nursing 2025	Nursing 2030	Nursing 2040	Residential 2025	Residential 2030	Residential 2040	Dom Care 2025	Dom Care 2030	Dom Care 2040	Supported living 2025	Supported living 2030	Supported living 2040	Other 2025	Other 2030	Other 2040
Cherwell	186	201	215	204	231	249	450	494	530	32	35	38	188	206	221
Oxford	134	142	150	162	174	185	290	319	343	25	22	22	96	106	114
South Oxfordshire	175	222	251	185	242	269	312	340	363	25	32	35	137	150	160
Vale of White Horse	214	246	272	273	298	325	432	486	534	33	32	33	134	150	165
West Berkshire	221	239	252	244	270	285	456	489	514	36	37	39	164	175	184
West Oxfordshire	217	212	217	220	209	217	349	388	421	26	34	39	114	127	137

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Out of county and unknown demand has been redistributed.

Data tables: Demand

CSC :

District	CiC 2025	CiC 2030	CiC 2040	Residential 2025	Residential 2030	Residential 2040	IFA Fostering 2025	IFA Fostering 2030	IFA Fostering 2040	Internal Fostering 2025	Internal Fostering 2030	Internal Fostering 2040	Other 2025	Other 2030	Other 2040
Cherwell	165	163	162	35	34	34	36	35	35	55	55	55	39	38	38
Oxford	271	271	273	40	40	40	81	81	82	101	101	102	49	49	50
South Oxfordshire	133	128	125	21	20	19	49	47	46	31	30	29	33	32	31
Vale of White Horse	165	165	166	23	23	23	49	49	50	58	58	58	35	35	35
West Berkshire	189	180	173	34	32	31	52	50	48	61	58	56	41	39	38
West Oxfordshire	85	83	82	22	21	21	18	17	17	21	21	20	24	24	24

SEND :

District	Mainstream School 2025	Mainstream School 2030	Mainstream School 2040	MSS 2025	MSS 2030	MSS 2040	INMSS 2025	INMSS 2030	INMSS 2040	Other 2025	Other 2030	Other 2040
Cherwell	1193	1415	1495	343	372	385	127	158	164	479	544	565
Oxford	651	804	980	256	278	306	61	83	112	351	440	532
South Oxfordshire	974	1212	1283	285	323	336	123	164	183	412	458	480
Vale of White Horse	1108	1319	1419	361	402	426	156	212	235	404	470	504
West Berkshire	742	1044	1215	321	452	526	84	118	137	387	544	633
West Oxfordshire	678	864	951	214	248	262	84	116	149	357	434	486

Out of county, unknown and UASC demand has been redistributed.

Data tables: Unit costs

WAA :

District	Nursing Avg Cost per Week 2025	Nursing Avg Cost per Week 2030	Nursing Avg Cost per Week 2040	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2025	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2030	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2040	Dom Care Avg Cost per Week 2025	Dom Care Avg Cost per Week 2030	Dom Care Avg Cost per Week 2040	Supported living Avg Cost per Week 2025	Supported living Avg Cost per Week 2030	Supported living Avg Cost per Week 2040	Other Avg Cost per Week 2025	Other Avg Cost per Week 2030	Other Avg Cost per Week 2040
Cherwell	1880	2216	3078	1764	2077	2881	278	328	455	666	784	1089	527	621	862
Oxford	1878	2215	3080	1761	2075	2880	278	328	454	668	787	1094	528	621	862
South Oxfordshire	1878	2213	3071	1766	2080	2886	279	328	455	666	785	1090	527	621	862
Vale of White Horse	1883	2220	3084	1762	2076	2880	278	328	454	666	784	1088	527	621	862
West Berkshire	1851	2181	3025	1718	2024	2807	278	327	454	659	777	1077	526	620	860
West Oxfordshire	1876	2211	3070	1763	2077	2881	278	328	455	666	784	1089	527	621	861

OA : 477

District	Nursing Avg Cost per Week 2025	Nursing Avg Cost per Week 2030	Nursing Avg Cost per Week 2040	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2025	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2030	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2040	Dom Care Avg Cost per Week 2025	Dom Care Avg Cost per Week 2030	Dom Care Avg Cost per Week 2040	Supported living Avg Cost per Week 2025	Supported living Avg Cost per Week 2030	Supported living Avg Cost per Week 2040	Other Avg Cost per Week 2025	Other Avg Cost per Week 2030	Other Avg Cost per Week 2040
Cherwell	688	812	1128	637	751	1042	271	319	443	0	0	0	419	493	685
Oxford	688	813	1129	636	751	1043	271	319	443	0	0	0	419	493	685
South Oxfordshire	688	812	1127	637	751	1043	271	319	443	0	0	0	419	494	685
Vale of White Horse	688	812	1127	636	750	1041	271	319	443	0	0	0	419	494	685
West Berkshire	687	809	1122	634	747	1036	271	319	443	0	0	0	419	493	684
West Oxfordshire	688	811	1126	636	751	1042	271	319	443	0	0	0	419	494	685

Out of county and unknown costs have been redistributed.

Data tables: Unit costs

CSC :

District	CiC Avg Cost per Week 2025	CiC Avg Cost per Week 2030	CiC Avg Cost per Week 2040	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2025	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2030	Residential Avg Cost per Week 2040	IFA Fostering Avg Cost per Week 2025	IFA Fostering Avg Cost per Week 2030	IFA Fostering Avg Cost per Week 2040	Internal Fostering Avg Cost per Week 2025	Internal Fostering Avg Cost per Week 2030	Internal Fostering Avg Cost per Week 2040	Other Avg Cost per Week 2025	Other Avg Cost per Week 2030	Other Avg Cost per Week 2040
Cherwell	2127	2498	3458	6197	7299	10127	1075	1267	1757	615	725	1006	1603	1889	2620
Oxford	1751	2063	2862	6197	7299	10127	1075	1267	1757	615	725	1006	1603	1889	2620
South Oxfordshire	1887	2225	3090	6197	7299	10127	1075	1267	1757	615	725	1006	1603	1889	2620
Vale of White Horse	1735	2043	2834	6197	7299	10127	1075	1267	1757	615	725	1006	1603	1889	2620
West Berkshire	1955	2303	3195	6197	7299	10127	1075	1267	1757	615	725	1006	1603	1889	2620
West Oxfordshire	2435	2861	3962	6197	7299	10127	1075	1267	1757	615	725	1006	1603	1889	2620

SEND :

District	Mainstream School Avg Cost per Week 2025	Mainstream School Avg Cost per Week 2030	Mainstream School Avg Cost per Week 2040	MSS Avg Cost per Week 2025	MSS Avg Cost per Week 2030	MSS Avg Cost per Week 2040	INMSS Avg Cost per Week 2025	INMSS Avg Cost per Week 2030	INMSS Avg Cost per Week 2040	Other Avg Cost per Week 2025	Other Avg Cost per Week 2030	Other Avg Cost per Week 2040
Cherwell	164	193	268	504	593	823	2296	2704	3751	233	274	381
Oxford	164	193	268	504	594	824	2298	2706	3754	233	275	381
South Oxfordshire	164	193	268	504	594	823	2297	2707	3756	233	274	381
Vale of White Horse	164	193	268	504	593	823	2296	2704	3751	233	274	381
West Berkshire	164	193	268	504	593	823	2295	2704	3751	233	274	381
West Oxfordshire	164	193	268	504	594	823	2297	2707	3758	233	274	381

Out of county, unknown and UASC costs have been redistributed.

Data Tables: Step up factor

STEP UP FACTOR

Proposed Authority	Population 65+ 2023	IMD	Median income	Mid	Step up factor	Scenario
Oxfordshire	136.2k	11.6	£36.5k	1063.5	1.0000	Baseline
West Berkshire	32.5k	9.9	£36.7k	1093.3	1.0280	Baseline
Oxfordshire	136.2k	11.6	£36.5k	1063.5	1.0000	Scenario 1 (Single Unitary)
North	75.2k	13.8	£35.4k	1038.1	0.9762	Scenario 2 (Two Unitary)
South	93.5k	8.9	£37.7k	1105.4	1.0394	Scenario 2 (Two Unitary)
Cherwell & West Oxon	55.4k	12.1	£34.8k	1051.3	0.9886	Scenario 3
Oxford	19.8k	17.0	£36.4k	1025.5	0.9643	Scenario 3
South	93.5k	8.9	£37.7k	1105.4	1.0394	Scenario 3

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Local Government Reorganisation: Impact on people services

If you would like to discuss the content of this report or would like any further information, please contact:

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CCN COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK Newton

Appendix 7

CfGS - Neighbourhood governance in Oxfordshire, Options exploration report (August 2025)

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Neighbourhood governance in Oxfordshire: options exploration

August 2025

CfGS
Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

About the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) is a social purpose consultancy and national centre of expertise, working to improve decision-making for the public good. We support local government and wider public services to strengthen governance, transparency, and accountability.

Founded in 2003, CfGS has grown into a respected national charity, helping organisations design and deliver more inclusive, evidence-based, and outcomes-focused governance. We believe the best decisions are made when they are constructively challenged, well-evidenced, and shaped by those they affect.

Our work goes beyond structures—we support cultural change, build capacity, and champion values that lead to better outcomes. We collaborate with councils, national bodies, and partners to ensure scrutiny plays a vital role in good governance, shaping a better society for all.

Introduction

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) has been commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council to explore how neighbourhood governance — the ways in which decisions are made closer to communities — might evolve following local government reorganisation in the county.

This report brings together this short research commission, carried out through interviews and desk research. It seeks to support ongoing conversations about the way that a future council or councils might connect with the needs of its residents at the most local level.

In this report we examine potential models for how a future council or councils might do this, setting out different options for local-level governance arrangements, which we refer to throughout this report as "neighbourhood governance".

Permanent arrangements for neighbourhood governance can only be made by a new authority, or authorities, once they are set up, following a council reorganisation.

So rather than define action, this report is designed to be a tool to engage residents and other stakeholders in conversations about future governance arrangements. It outlines a set of insights, principles, and requirements for how different neighbourhood governance arrangements might evolve and work – and lays out one potential model in order to provoke thinking and dialogue. It is designed to support such thinking and dialogue irrespective of the structural approach that Government chooses to pursue.

Oxfordshire County Council has also committed to sharing the final output to inform wider discussions and planning across all the authorities involved in Oxfordshire's reorganisation.

CfGS would like to thank all those who contributed to this work by speaking to us during June 2025, and to the officers of Oxfordshire County Council who provided logistically and administrative assistance in our evidence-gathering.

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Summary of methodology

This report is based on a combination of desk research and structured qualitative engagement. We spoke with 52 individuals from eleven organisations through a series of one-to-one interviews and small focus groups conducted in July 2025. Participants included councillors, officers, and representatives from organisations with a stake in the future of local governance in Oxfordshire.

The conversations explored four core themes: **identity and sense of place; local power, leadership and accountability; community engagement and participation; and the practicalities and support needed for neighbourhood governance to function effectively**. Findings were triangulated with relevant research and examples from elsewhere in the UK and internationally, helping to build a grounded but outward-looking evidence base.

The research was underpinned by a number of connected principles:

- **CfGS's work is not premised on the adoption of a particular structural model for Oxfordshire**. We have been commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council which is developing a proposal for Option 1. However, a renewed focus on neighbourhood governance will be necessary irrespective of the model Government chooses, because the structural result of reorganisation will bring fewer, larger councils[1].

- **Our work is introductory and exploratory in nature – it supports the start of a wider, ongoing conversation**. We have spoken to only a few people, and carried out a limited amount of documentary analysis with the intention of setting out the overall landscape for people at a local level to explore in more detail. At this stage we can suggest possible models and approaches but we can't make recommendations or proposals for change. In particular, a wider range of insights directly from the public, and a range of other stakeholders, will add richness and nuance to these preliminary findings and the conclusions we have reached on their basis.

- **The options and opportunities we explore must be grounded in the needs of Oxfordshire as a place**. Any approach to neighbourhood governance must reflect specific local circumstances – it must respond to the actually existing position rather than set out an arbitrary, idealised model of what perfect neighbourhood governance arrangements might look like.

More detail on the methodology adopted for the work can be found at Appendix A.

[1] We have commented on a future model for the municipal governance of the City of Oxford, in doing so recognising that Option 3 involves the creation of a "Greater Oxford" council, the context for which would involve a different approach to neighbourhood governance.

Executive summary

This report is divided into three main parts.

In the first part, we have explored the current landscape. We have sought to define what neighbourhood governance is, to explore the role of parishes, principal authorities and wider community activism in what happens at the most local level. We have sought to set out what this means, overall, for what a future model for neighbourhood governance in Oxfordshire will need to look like.

In the second part, we have explored what others do. We have looked at the UK and beyond, reviewing the various models that exist to support public bodies and local people to work together at a local level. We have drawn out some lessons from that review, by way of setting out what are the key components of making neighbourhood governance work.

In the third part, we have explored what this means for Oxfordshire. We have laid out some design principles to inform the construction of a model for neighbourhood governance across the county. We have then – by way of illustration, not as a recommendation – laid out a possible future framework which centres the possible establishment of new area committees – with a core duty relating to neighbourhood planning – as having connected functions relating to supporting, and building capacity, within existing communities and neighbourhoods, rather than (for example) as bodies to themselves make decisions or to direct operational spending.

In the fourth part, we have applied some of these ideas and principles specifically to the city of Oxford, to explore what a model for municipal governance might look like if Government chooses a structural option which involves the abolition of the existing city council.

Exploring the existing landscape

We define "neighbourhood governance" as involving three principal activities:

- **Design of place.** This is about discussing, setting out and pursuing a vision for the local area.
- **Decision-making about place.** This is about local people influencing and informing decisions made by others that might affect them.
- **Delivery in place.** This is about local people making ongoing arrangements to meet their own needs and the needs of their fellow residents by directly delivering services and/or carrying out connected community action.

Across Oxfordshire there is a huge range of activity that connects to these three tasks.

- We looked at **the work of parish councils**, and the work of principal authorities, in engaging with local people.
- We looked at **how certain services for which principal authorities are responsible are designed and delivered in partnership with local people** – practices that reflect a complex patchwork which cannot easily be mapped.
- Finally we looked at **the wider array of community activity which happens across the county area** – formal and informal work, of substantial breadth and scope. All of this work enhances community resilience and much aims to make practical, positive differences to local people's lives. Most happens at a highly local, human scale.

But there is **very little capacity in the system**, and risks attached where those capacity challenges are most acute. In some cases, important parts of the social fabric are supported by a small number of people, or key institutions, which may not see themselves as being "anchors" or enablers of what others around them are doing.

We have looked at Oxfordshire's future needs, and the major strategic plans that aim to create a more inclusive future for growth and productivity in the local economy – we have also thought that about inevitable challenges that come with growth and development, and how these play out at the most local level.

Underpinning all of this is the need for neighbourhood governance to support, and grow, community resilience.

We have tried to use our understanding of this overall picture to frame what Oxfordshire's needs are in respect of future neighbourhood governance. We think these needs are:

- **Interconnectedness with wider public service objectives.** Investing in neighbourhood governance is also an investment in the wider goals of inclusive economic growth, tackling deprivation, and improving life chances. Strengthening neighbourhood governance helps to build the social fabric that underpins these outcomes — by enabling resilient, self-supporting communities to take a more active role in shaping the places they live in.

- **Messiness.** Sustainable arrangements for community action within neighbourhoods look messy. The presence of messiness reflects the fact that neighbourhood governance arrangements are not ones that can be easily "held" by a new principal authority or authorities. Community activity is organic and reflects the places within which it operates – neighbourhood systems operated by councils and other public sector bodies needs to fit around that existing reality.

- **Informal vs formal.** Some community action happens through formal means – legal, public decision-making, formal partnerships and agreements, and activities undertaken by formally constituted bodies that often hold specific accountabilities to

local people. Much more is informal in nature and the "formal" activity often supports the informal in ways that are not apparent to policymakers and decision-makers.

- **Asymmetry as a core feature.** Asymmetry is an inherent characteristic of neighbourhood governance. Different parts of the ecosystem operate with varying levels of capability, legitimacy, and ambition — even among larger town councils, there is no single, shared understanding of purpose or role. Any attempt to devolve power or responsibility uniformly across an area is likely to fall short.

- **Consistency.** The way that certain services are designed and delivered needs to be consistent across the whole area. Many services need to be subject to the formality associated with a rules-based system – particularly those services which need to be provided a certain way by law. This is particularly the case for personal services that are built around legal rights and entitlements, but also those services provided universally.

- **Capacity building** to support ongoing community activity, anchored in a realistic and long term approach to resourcing. The need to build and maintain community capacity is a necessary prerequisite for meaningful neighbourhood governance.

- **Visibility.** No-one should expect to be able to see the entire system of community and neighbourhood-based activity across the whole county area. But there needs to be an awareness of the presence of a wider ecosystem around community activity that acknowledges the messiness and asymmetry that we describe above, as well as other characteristics.

- **Mindset, attitude and culture.** Amongst professionals, there is likely to be a need to shift behaviours around engagement, participation and communication with local neighbourhoods – fostering a greater spirit of trust and mutual honesty and joining up professional-led activity.

- **Community intelligence.** Insight from local people — grounded in lived experience and local relationships — can bring to the surface details that may be missed by even the most skilled professionals working at a distance. When shared, this intelligence doesn't just inform better decision-making; it also builds collective understanding of local challenges and creates a stronger foundation for co-produced solutions.

Exploring what others do

We wanted to examine what happens elsewhere in the UK, what happens beyond the UK and what "good practice" tells us about developing more inclusive approaches to the involvement of local people in shaping and taking action in their own areas.

We conclude that there are three components to making effective neighbourhood governance "stick":

- **Shifts in behaviour**. Evidence from elsewhere reinforces our understanding that moving to a better designed approach to support for local community action, and neighbourhood governance (in how places are shaped, how decisions are made, and how services are delivered) requires more than structural reform. It requires behavioural shifts. These shifts involve public service professionals stepping into the spaces where communities already operate — developing a deeper, more holistic understanding of civic infrastructure, and working collaboratively to respond to local needs and opportunities.
- **Ensuring central democratic control and oversight**. How do we empower neighbourhoods meaningfully while maintaining system-wide integrity and accountability – in particular, accountability for democratically-elected politicians who have been elected to represent local people? Control systems are necessary, but they should be light-touch and enabling, not bureaucratic and restrictive.
- **"Docking in" new arrangements with existing, more traditional, parts of the governance landscape**. Local participation must be meaningful, enduring, and taken seriously. That means not treating community-led governance as an optional extra or one-off experiment but embedding it into how a council makes decisions. To achieve that, participatory and neighbourhood governance must be able to 'dock into' formal systems of public decision-making. This isn't about limiting local agency — it's about giving it weight, status, and permanence. If communities are to play a real role in shaping places, decisions flowing from that involvement need to have legitimacy in the eyes of the law and the wider public.

Exploring the possibilities for Oxfordshire

In defining an approach that might work for Oxfordshire, we want to establish some design principles against which various different approaches and models for neighbourhood governance can be judged. Our design principles draw on our statement of Oxfordshire's neighbourhood governance needs – they are:

- **Supporting the legitimacy and role of elected politicians.** Representative democracy is the central bulwark of our democratic system. Any approach to strengthen neighbourhood governance will need to give elected councillors – at principal council and parish level – a central role.

- **A rules-based approach.** People need to deal with public institutions that will work consistently and transparency. This is important when needs and appetites for services and local interventions will be different from area to area – reflecting the asymmetry that forms an important part of any approach to neighbourhood

governance. Transparency will be needed to avoid the risk that this kind of asymmetry is seen as favouritism.

- **Effective management and ownership of risk.** When services are designed and delivered with local people – when we use different approaches to work with them and within their neighbourhoods – it can be more difficult to agree who actually makes the decisions, and who holds the responsibility for risk and accountability.

- **Framed around public service partnership.** Through designation as a Marmot Place, the county wants to expand on its work supporting local people by working more closely with its partners. There is a recognition (through the work of Community Action Groups and other mechanisms) that there is a need to strengthen this approach. Neighbourhood governance systems can and should support this kind of joint working.

- **A strengths-based approach building on what already exists.** Across the county, a huge variety of arrangements exist for neighbourhood and community activity, some of it supported by principal authorities but much of it not. The focus will need to be on the strengthening of the connective tissue associated with neighbourhood-based activity rather than necessarily "doing more" of that activity – thereby increasingly community resilience. This is why we see this work strengthening and deepening the commitments made by councils across the area through the Oxfordshire Charter.

- **Providing opportunity for debate and discussion on tensions and tradeoffs, anchored in neighbourhood planning**. A big challenge for the county area is management of the tensions and disagreements arising from growth and development. Neighbourhood governance arrangements should be anchored in neighbourhood planning – a process with statutory definition[2] that will help local areas to manage these tensions and tradeoffs, and place them in a wider context.

- **County-wide consistency, but with significant local divergence.** This may sounds contradictory. On the one hand it would be unfair and inequitable (and in some cases illegal) for principal authorities to offer services on a dramatically differential basis depending on geography. On the other hand it is right that public services flex to meet local need and capacity. Having a framework to determine this balance will be an important part of any approach to neghbourhood ggovernance.

Based on these design principles we set out **one potential approach** – the establishment **of a system of area committees**. We do also set out a range of alternative and/or complementary models at the end of the report, in section 3F.

Because defining "neighbourhoods" is challenging, we suggest that these bodies would cover a wider geography, covering an area of several (new) councils wards.

[2] We note that Government's recent (spring 2025) decision to remove funding support for neighbourhood planning activity will present a challenge here.

These would not be decision-making bodies but bodies designed to support and enable wider community development activity – bodies existing to support, and to act as **anchor institutions** for, the wider range of community activity happens from place to place. To carry out this role these committees would need to be supported by a part of a new council that we have called a "Neighbourhood Unit".

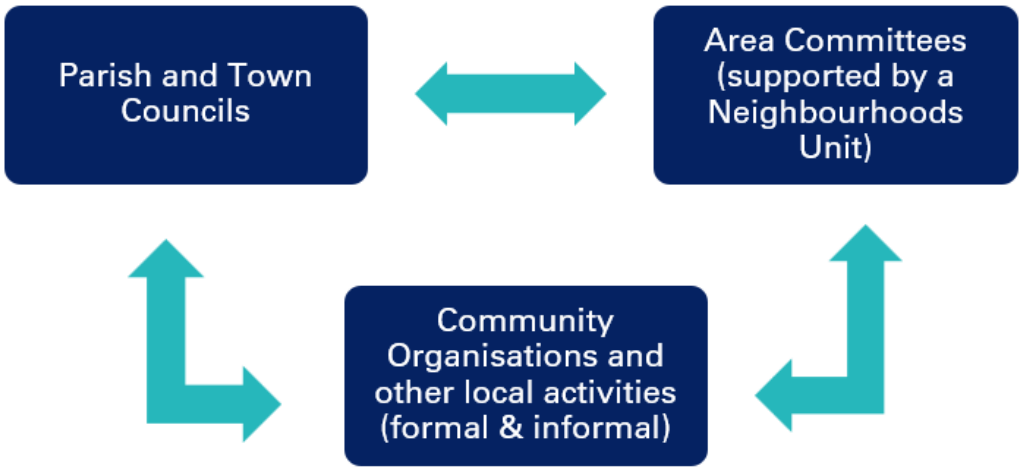

Illustration of core relationships. Arrows denote flows of insight and intelligence, and resource and support.

Area committees would enjoy a particularly close relationship with parish councils, as democratic partners and as institutions which area committees could themselves support – while ensuring that parishes retain their independence.

In our model these committees would do three connected things, which echo and reinforce our descriptions of neighbourhood governance in part 1 of the report:

- **Mapping and understanding – seeking to develop a common understanding of the "place"**
- **Providing support, capacity and resource – being incubators for community activity**
- **Providing direction and oversight – on certain operational decisions, and on other matters**

In support of these three activities area committees would have a core function – holding responsibility for neighbourhood planning – to give them a formal role around shaping the place and ensuring that the future design of that place is managed in a way that is inclusive.

Exploring the possibilities for Oxford

The City of Oxford has its own distinct needs with regard to governance. In commissioning

us the county councils asked us to look at options for Oxford specifically – reflecting the fact that under two of the three options for reorganisation, Oxford will lose the distinct, independent municipal governance that it has enjoyed for a millennium.

This is an experience that other towns and cities have gone through in recent years. We wanted to explore – in part based on their experiences – two issues:

- Which aspects of neighbourhood governance – design, decision-making, delivery – might usefully be carried out city-wide in Oxford?
- Which structures might be established, and maintained, in order to do this?

In terms of duties, we think that there is a case for city-wide decision-making (and delivery) on the following issues:

- Management of community assets / community facilities
- Management of parks and green spaces
- Community development and the management of cultural activities
- Business and economic development, and tourism
- Licensing and planning decision-making (although the legality and remit of these tasks would need to be subject to review – see below)
- (Social housing) estate management, where appropriate

In terms of structures, for many the first obvious option is the establishment of *a new first-tier city council for Oxford* – covering the same boundaries as the current district but with a smaller range of duties and responsibilities befitting the status of a community council. This would either involve a community governance review leading to the abolition of the existing parish councils in the area or the establishment of a new council to cover the existing unparished area of the city.

Such a new council would be by some distance the most populous first-tier authority in England. Government's willingness to agree, as part of LGR, to the proposed establishment of a new parish council of this size, presumably with precepting powers, is difficult to read. It could be seen as seeking to recreate two-tier government by the back door.

Alternatives involve *a federated model* – the establishment of a small number of new parishes which are "grouped" with the existing parish councils in the city of Oxford to form a kind of federation, which makes decisions on city-wide matters collectively – but this would be a novel form of governance for England even if it has precedents from overseas.

The option that we would be keen to see explored further is the use of the **charter trustee** arrangements which a new council would otherwise need to establish in order to retain Oxford's city status and Royal Charter as a way of composing an area committee which has an enhanced range of decision-making responsibilities for the city.

Provocations

- How can governance systems reflect the lived identity of places — beyond administrative boundaries?
- Can we design governance in a way that builds civic identity, especially in places where formal structures are missing?
- How can we build local structures that are flexible and proportionate to each place?
- Who holds power at the local level — and how do they become accountable for it? How important is it who the key decision-makers are?
- How (and should) can councillors and officers shift from gatekeepers to enablers of shared leadership?
- What institutional architecture supports long-term, community-powered governance?
- What institutional architecture supports communities, neighbourhoods and areas to be more resilient?
- How can we ensure equity when capacity and confidence vary so widely across places?
- What kinds of investment and support make shared governance viable?
- How can we ensure equity when capacity and confidence vary so widely across places?
- What does meaningful participation look like in the next phase of local democracy?
- Can we turn one-off engagement into a standing system for collaborative decision-making?
- How can co-production move from the health and care sector into the mainstream of local governance?
- What makes deliberation truly powerful and policy-relevant?

1. Exploring the existing landscape

1A: Context

In December 2024, the Government announced its wish to reorganise the boundaries, roles and responsibilities of councils in two tier (district and county) areas in England.

In February 2025, Jim McMahon MP, Minister of State for Local Government, sent a formal letter to councils in two-tier areas across England, including in Oxfordshire, inviting areas to submit proposals for change. Councils were told that initial proposals needed to be submitted by March 2025, with detailed proposals submitted by November 2025.

Councils in Oxfordshire submitted three different outline proposals.

- **Option one** was for a single county unitary, and was supported by Oxfordshire County Council.
- **Option two** was for two unitary councils – one in the north of the area and one in the south, also encompassing parts of neighbouring county areas. This option was supported by shire district councils in the area.
- **Option three** was for three unitary councils – one in the north of the county and one in the south alongside a "Greater Oxford" council. This option was supported by Oxford City Council.

The letter was accompanied by guidance setting out the overall criteria that Government would be using to choose which option to take forward.

This guidance did not set out specific expectations for how submissions should ensure that a future council or councils would have the arrangements in place to ensure accountability at local level, including the establishment of locality or neighbourhood arrangements for the delivery of local services, or to ensure effective local engagement in the business of the new authority or authorities.

Government has said that its preference, in areas undergoing local government reorganisation, is that councils will establish area, or neighbourhood, committees, and considers that this will be an important component in support for community development. The Minister of State for Local Government said in a statement to Parliament in June[3]:

> "A simplified and standardised system of local area-working and governance is needed, and neighbourhood Area Committees, led by frontline ward councillors,

[3] Hansard, 3 June 2025: https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-06-03/hcws676

are the best route to achieve this. Neighbourhood Area Committees support local authorities to deliver their commitments to community partnership-working at a neighbourhood level. There are also opportunities to bring in other service providers into broader membership of neighbourhood Area Committees, for instance town or parish councillors where they exist, and co-opted members from other local community organisations. This allows for the benefit of structural efficiencies from Local Governance Reorganisation while deepening localism and engagement across every community."

Provision for the establishment of new neighbourhood committees has been made in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, with the detail to come in forthcoming (at the time of writing) Regulations.

1B: Defining neighbourhood governance

For the purposes of this report, CfGS defines "neighbourhood governance" as the way in which local people, either directly or through their elected representatives, can undertake action in **three main areas**:

1. **Design of place**. This is about **discussing, setting out and pursuing a vision for the local area**. In some areas, neighbourhood planning is the anchor for this activity – the kind of long-term discussion about what people want the area to look like now and in the future.

2. **Decision-making about place**. This is about **influencing and informing decisions made by others that might affect them**. This influence might be through informal dialogue with decision-makers, or more formal mechanisms like engagement with traditional "consultations". It can also involve the use of deeper, participatory methods in which local people co-produce, and co-design, aspects of local services with decision-makers who might be from the local council, the NHS or another public body.

3. **Delivery in place**. This is about **local people making ongoing arrangements to meet their own needs and the needs of their fellow residents by directly delivering services and/or carrying out connected community action[4].** This might be through organisations or groups which are formal (like a parish council, or a formally constituted group or association) or informal (like a group of neighbours

[4] Calling all of this activity "delivery" is perhaps a public service-centric view of the breadth of what this community action – much of it based on local, social relationships – does. We think that it is likely that, in talking about activity here, people involved in subsequent conversations will need to break this down and develop a perhaps more sophisticated typology.

or volunteers who might come together to do things to make the local area better).

This is not a definitive description. In the interviews we conducted, there was a very wide range of understanding and expectations about what "neighbourhood governance" might be.

Words like **neighbourhood, community and locality** are used sometimes interchangeably by different people. The use of a variety of different terms can serve to obscure meaning, and can make it difficult to even begin a conversation about the fundamental premise associated with neighbourhood governance that we have described above.

For example:

- the word "**neighbourhood**" has a clear geographical focus, but some people might use it to describe an area of a few square miles while others (the NHS, for example) use the word to describe a far wider geographical area.
- some people use the word "**community**" to mean the same thing as "**neighbourhood**" but for others a "**community**" might not be something defined by geography but by life experience or need – so for example there may be a "community" of carers across the county of Oxfordshire.
- the word "**locality**" is used by some councils as defining the areas used by those councils to deliver certain local services;
- some people's thinking about what **neighbourhood, locality or community** working might look like might lean towards one of our three descriptors more than another.

For some neighbourhood governance is also about advocacy – campaigning and influencing public sector bodies to do or not do certain things. For some it is about direct, street by street community action – typified by things like mutual aid. And for others it is about the presence and operation of more traditional structures, like parish councils.

Developing a shared understanding about what these concepts mean will probably be necessary for stakeholders in Oxfordshire as they continue to explore how neighbourhood governance arrangements can be designed to be meaningful.

We think that these conversations will need to be framed in such a way as to be practically meaningful – using as a base the kinds of examples and approaches we set out in parts 2 and 3 of this paper. As part of this exercise, local stakeholders might want to carry out some deeper local mapping to expand on existing knowledge and where, and how, local networks, connections and relationships between organisations exist, and their strengths and weaknesses.

1C: The work of parish, town and community councils

We start our detailed consideration of what neighbourhood governance looks like across Oxfordshire by reviewing the role carried out by parish councils.

The county is fully parished, apart from the main part of the City of Oxford. Oxford has three long-standing parishes, reflecting areas brought within the city boundaries at various points over the past fifty years, and another parish, Blackbird Leys, established more recently[5].

In some parished areas where there is no parish council in place, annual parish meetings[6] may be convened to carry out certain duties, and to hold certain powers in statute which would otherwise be exercised by a parish council.

While some parishes do co-ordinate their work – and may contract jointly for things like grass cutting – there are no formal grouping arrangements for parishes within the county[7].

The recently agreed Oxfordshire Councils Charter[8] sets out a framework for better partnership working in Oxfordshire, defined by two strategic aims:

- Stronger partnership working between Oxfordshire councils, and;
- Enhancing local democracy.

The Charter also sets out "shared principles" – which provide useful context to the way that behaviours inform the quality of neighbourhood governance. These are:

- Mutual respect (about recognising commonalities and differences and acting in good faith);
- Transparency and accountability (about sharing information and being transparent about things like decision-making);
- Relationship-building (about fostering collaborative relationships and removing the barriers to doing this that might exist).

This framework (accompanied by shared commitments, and plans for implementation) is likely to provide a basis for ongoing conversations around neighbourhood governance. Some interviews told us that the quality of communication between parishes and principal authorities is not always as good as it could be, although the presence of the Charter aims to make things more consistent and systematic.

Parishes' activities relating to neighbourhood governance

We want to set out how we see parishes currently contribute to the three aspects of neighbourhood governance that we described in the introduction – **design, decision-making and delivery**.

[5] In comparison with other parishes Blackbird Leys is slightly unusual in that it holds no explicit service delivery responsibilities. It principal areas of focus have been neighbourhood planning and place-shaping, and more general community development in what is one of Oxford's most deprived areas.
[6] Further to provisions in the Local Government Act 1972, ss9, 13 et seq
[7] Grouping is provided for under s11 of the Local Government Act 1972. Further guidance on grouping can be found in "Guidance on community governance reviews" (DCLG / LGBCE, 2010): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a78e983ed915d0422066530/1527635.pdf
[8] "Oxfordshire Councils Charter": https://www.oalc.org.uk/oxfordshire-councils-charter

In doing so there are two foundational issues that we have identified that will need to inform conclusions about what current practice tells us about plans for the future.

Firstly, parishes, as institutions, are part of a wider local ecosystem of "neighbourhood governance". Some interviewees spoke about parish and town councils as being, in their eyes, one and the same thing as the idea of "neighbourhood governance" generally. However, they are more correctly seen as part of a wider ecosystem of local organisations and groups.

This does not however mean that parishes carry out a formal role in co-ordinating this community activity – though such co-ordination may happen informally.

For example, in some areas:

- members of a parish council may play a role on other organisations – providing an informal connection.
- parish councils may provide small grants or other forms of assistance to local groups or bodies, or support volunteer community activities.
- parish councils may own and rent out for a relatively small fee a local hall.

In each case the council is acting as a facilitator of wider community activity without this necessarily being acknowledged as such – as well as providing vital community capacity and capability to support the wider local ecosystem.

Secondly, parishes have varied capacity, capability and appetite for carrying out the broad range of "neighbourhood governance" roles that we have identified. Some are large institutions with substantial budgets and a number of permanent staff – some town councils fall into this category. Many however are very small, enjoying the support only of a part time clerk.

Town and parish councils struggle to fill councillor vacancies, even through co-option[9]. This creates a challenge for perceptions of legitimacy, as few seats are contested in elections, as well as presenting capacity and capability problems. We were told that people might be put off from involvement because of old fashioned ideas of what parish councils do (including the use of the word "parish").

We were also told that the presence of a comparatively small number of particularly active, engaged and long-standing elected members at parish level was what made the difference in terms of the overall capacity and capability of many councils – which raises challenges around the resilience of some of those institutions, and the potential need for further capacity support[10].

Dealing with capacity and capability: setting up new parishes

[9] This is not unique to Oxfordshire, and reflects a wider national challenge.
[10] See part 3

New parishes may be set up as a result of a community governance review (CGR) carried out (in a two-tier area) by a shire district[11]. CGRs have been periodically carried out by districts across Oxfordshire. In many cases this involves minor changes to boundaries, but it can also involve the creation of wholly new parishes. For example, associated with the western expansion of Didcot, a Western Valley Parish Council was recently established, to cover Great Western Park and parts of Harwell.

Associated with the production of the Headington Neighbourhood Plan, Oxford City Council held a consultation in 2020 to assess appetite for a new parish for the (unparished) area concerned; a narrow majority of a small number of respondents were against the establishment of such a body.

Government has recently (mid-2025) indicated that it wants to proceed with caution on the establishment of new precepting parishes as part of the reorganisation process[12].

Bearing these factors in mind how, then, does the role of the parish map onto our three main roles for neighbourhood governance?

- **Parishes shaping the place ("design"):** Parishes have played, and continue to play, a role in "place shaping" in a way that is framed by formal neighbourhood planning arrangements. Parishes have variable capacity to engage with this visioning activity – and some have limited interest in it. We have been told that high level planning activity can feel disconnected from the practical circumstances in which people live their lives. This is even the case for major plans and strategies with a significant impact on local communities. This is a challenge that has long been recognised as a feature of the plan-led development system in England, but also cuts across to the way that local people think of the future of their towns, villages and areas from a more social perspective. Where this locally led visioning activity does happen, it is often built around proposals for development, such as through the Homes England-supported "Garden Communities" initiative[13]. We are, however, aware of exceptions – such as the activity undertaken by the county council to develop "community insight profiles" (CIPs)[14] – documents that aim to describe local communities and to use the insights arising to put in place managed interventions to support local people's lives.

[11] Further to provisions for such reviews in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
[12] "Minister warns against recreating two-tier structures via parishes" (Local Government Chronicle, 4 July 2025): https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/devolution-and-economic-growth/minister-warns-against-recreating-two-tier-structures-via-parishes-04-07-2025/
[13] "Garden communities toolkit" (Homes England, 2019): https://www.gov.uk/guidance/garden-communities. See also "Garden communities set to flourish across England" (Government press release, 24 May 2022): https://www.gov.uk/government/news/garden-communities-set-to-flourish-across-england
[14] Accessible on the Oxfordshire Data Hub: https://data.oxfordshire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/community-insight-profiles/

- **Parishes engaging with principal authorities ("decision-making"):** Parish councils feed into the work of principal authorities in a variety of ways. Again, this varies by council and by topic, contributing to a complex tapestry of engagement. We were told that some less interested in contributing to partnership decision-making with principal authorities or do not have the capacity to do so. Parishes may also carry out work relating to neighbourhood planning[15]. Here, as elsewhere, capacity and experiences vary significantly. Co-production, and co-decision-making, between parishes and principal authorities is affected by the fact that principal authorities generally have their own arrangements to co-produce and co-design policy directly with local people – through formal consultation and more innovation approaches to involvement[16]. These arrangements do not cut out parish councils but they reflect the fact that parishes are seen as lacking – overall – the capacity to deal with those wider community objectives, rather than focusing on delivery.
- **Parish-led services ("delivery"):** Again, parishes' capability means there is substantial variability across Oxfordshire as to which councils deliver what services. Some of these may include:
    - Providing universal amenities: this may include public toilets, parks and recreation grounds, litter bins and street lighting;
    - Community support: organising festivals and other events, and carrying out activity to support local businesses and encourage tourism;
    - Ownership and management of certain community assets: councils may operate community halls or other public buildings which may be used as a base for wider community activity;
    - Operation of leisure facilities;
    - Management of allotments;
    - Acting as burial authorities, and managing burial grounds;
    - Provision of public car parking.

Case studies: parish involvement in design, decision-making and delivery in Oxfordshire

Dog waste bins

Under a long-standing arrangement district councils in parts of Oxfordshire have contracted for the emptying of these bins and charged part of the cost back to parishes. More recently, the councils involved determined that it needed to recover more of its costs and would therefore need to charge parishes closer to cost price for the service. Some parishes determined that they would make separate procurement arrangements for

[15] See section 2C
[16] See section 2C

waste bin emptying but found that quality and performance management was much more difficult than when arrangements were made county-wide. This highlights the capacity challenge of how to manage delivery of even a relatively "straightforward" operational service.

These and other experience highlight the need for conversations about the onward devolution of services to be couched in realism. We have been told that people don't mind who delivers services to them – just that they are delivered. Of course, the issue of who holds responsibility is, actually, pertinent to whether things are delivered or not, because understanding what successful delivery means involves understanding local communities sufficiently to translate their needs into action.

If we are to accept the idea that there are some services, and matters, where delivery arrangements are best managed at a local level, this commitment requires ongoing, meaningful capacity-building support.

OXTOG: joint action on local transport

OXTOG (Oxfordshire Together) is a county council initiative whereby the council comes together with town and parish councils, and the wider community, to explore and understanding local priorities on local transport and to take action. This involves supporting local volunteering (such as sign cleaning), and the delivery of certain highways and transport services by parishes.

It also includes verge cutting. This came up repeatedly in conversations as an example of a superficially straightforward matter that can be "devolved" to communities and to volunteers that is actually complex. In different communities, there are different expectations – on the frequency of grass cutting, on whether it should be done at all for environmental reasons, and on the relative importance to road safety of close-cutting verges. These are local disagreements that communities need to navigate, and they may need support to do so.

This work connects to Community Action Groups (CAGs[17]).

1D: Wider community activity across the county

Community action is of course not limited to parish councils. We have already noted that they are only part of a wider ecosystem of local community activity.

There are a huge range of individuals, groups and organisations carrying out work which in some way contributes positively to the local community. This work builds "community infrastructure" – the underpinnings that neighbourhoods need in order to feel like proper

[17] See section 1E

communities. This work also contributes to creating the conditions in which neighbourhoods are able to take on some of the tasks associated with the three objectives for community governance that we set out in the introduction – design, decision-making and delivery.

Some of the features of this activity that we have heard about include:

- **Activity is in many places built around existing social and support networks**. Informal community activity is sometimes ad hoc and difficult to separate from ordinary "social" activity;
- **Activity is informed by different views about what a "place", neighbourhood or community is**. The description of "neighbourhoods" and "localities" by different people and organisations does not lend itself to the drawing of lines on maps. A consistent sense of place is elusive – individuals will themselves hold overlapping sense of the different "communities" and "neighbourhoods" with regard to which they feel a sense a belonging. For example, we were told that some towns are siloed in their community activity – there are links between neighbourhoods, communities and groups within towns but little between towns, which may have implications for community resilience;
- **The most visible, cross-community and well-organised activity is often that which is galvanised by external threats and pressures**. Proposals for Botley West solar farm and the Abingdon reservoir are examples of these perceived threats acting as a focus around which community action can coalesce.
- **A lot of community activity (in particular, support networks for vulnerable people and groups, by existing networks and through mutual aid) developed significantly over the course of the pandemic, but the prospects for its sustainability and future growth are uncertain**. In part this is because of a lack of ongoing support in community "stewardship" and capacity building (for example Government's decision to withdraw funding from neighbourhood planning activity[18]). We were told that in some areas there had been a collective community exhaustion in the aftermath of the pandemic.
- **Rurality has a big impact**. Oxfordshire is the least densely populated county in south east England. Rurality has an impact on deprivation (and the visibility of deprivation) and on things like transport connectivity. It also contributes substantially to people's sense of place. People in more rural areas are unlikely to consider themselves as being connected to or "part of" their nearest town (see our comments above on "sense of place").

Making community activity more resilient: "anchor" institutions and support

Some community activity is undertaken by organisations that are independent, but which

[18] See section 2C

may have a commissioning relationship with, councils in the area. While this may not always be acknowledged

For example:

- **Healthwatch Oxfordshire** operates on a statutory footing, with its work commissioned by the county council. It has a role (subject to Government's announcement in June 2025 of its abolition) around patient advocacy that links clearly to the Marmot outcomes describes elsewhere in this paper.
- **Citizen's advice services in Oxfordshire**, delivered by institutions whose boundaries are not coterminous with those of the county, will contribute significantly to community resilience.
- The county council contracts with **Carers Oxfordshire** to provide information, advice and support to adult carers.

There are grant making organisations and other connected bodies, some of them area-specific. Oxfordshire Community Foundation is a county-wide grant making body; Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action's (OCVA) Connected Communities Fund provides micro-funding for activities specifically designed to support creating places that "support the people of Oxfordshire to live well in their community, remaining fit and healthy for as long as possible".

At area level, initiatives like the Didcot Powerhouse Fund have been established to make grants to support local people to tackle specific instances of deprivation and community need.

These, and other kinds of organisations and initiatives in the area, will all contribute to the presence of community infrastructure which will, in turn, facilitate other community activity – although interviewees have noted that for the most part (as is very typical) funding and support is not available to cover organisations' core costs. We were told by interviewees that more could be done to recognise the presence of "anchor" organisations by recognising the need for this additional resource and capacity, to recognise the wider work they do to facilitate neighbourhood governance, and to provide them with more capacity and resource to do so in a way that links up with wider public service outcomes.

1E: How public bodies contribute to neighbourhood governance

Work by principal authorities

The county council, the districts and the city carry out activity using varying degrees of

locality working. Area-wide, the county council has divided itself into 9 locality areas. Districts, and the city, have their own locality arrangements. For example, Oxford City Council operates a Localities Team that works across the four city council-designated localities in the city to provide support to community groups and organisations.

The overall picture is one of a broad range of different arrangements in place, that are not all managed in such a way as to enhance community resilience. There is the potential that these kinds of arrangements, taken together, could reduce the overall capability and capacity of neighbourhoods and communities to engage on their own terms. We have been told of the risk and reality of "consultation fatigue", and we have been told that principal authorities do not always bear in mind limited capacity when they do seek to engage.

Case study: enhancing community resilience in the delivery of adult social care

The county council's adult social care strategy, "The Oxfordshire Way", is framed around the development and delivery of support arrangements to adults with disabilities and long-term illnesses, further to the council's statutory duties under the Care Act 2004.

The strategy is framed around a strengths-based approach to support – focusing on supporting people to be independent within a supportive community environment, relying on informal networks and circles of support. The strategy cites an intention to "develop new services and partnerships to provide more choice and flexibility for people who need care and support, creating a flourishing network of support for people. For example, micro-enterprises supported by our partners Community Catalysts, and small voluntary sector organisations supported by our Connected Communities Fund".

The centrality of community led activity is important here, further emphasising that strong and resilient communities are central to the delivery of people-related services.

Other arrangements include (but are not limited to):

- **Community action groups (CAGs)[19].** A network initially established in 2001 to take local action on waste management, CAGs have been funded by the county council since 2004, most recently through the independent organisation "CAG Oxfordshire"[20]. CAGs' focus has expanded to cover sustainability more generally; some are now social enterprises. The model of incubation and support provided by long-term funding (and the resultant impact) provides a good example of how

[19] Current funding arrangements, and priority activity, for the network can be found at https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/waste-and-recycling/oxfordshire-recycles/community-action-groups#paragraph-15660

[20] https://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk/about

capacity-building support can develop civic infrastructure within communities and neighbourhoods.

- **Community place shaping** through the Garden Communities initiative[21]. This Homes England programme, managed and delivered through South and Vale Councils, involves support activity in two designated "Garden Towns" – Didcot and Berensfield. This has provided a mechanism to manage challenges associated with significant urban expansion.
- **General outreach by the political leaderships of individual authorities** (West Oxfordshire operates an "executive on tour" programme which involves the Cabinet meeting in different local communities to discuss matters of importance);
- **Flood risk management** (where communities are able to bid into pots of money to take local flood risk action, and where flood wardens and supervisors are appointed within the local community).
- **Friends' Groups attached to libraries**, in some cases involving the co-management of library services by volunteers.
- **Work on street trees**, where the county council has sought to appoint volunteer "Tree Guardians" to provide aftercare following planting. There has also been local decision-making relating to the placement of street trees, facilitated by OCC.
- **Community asset transfer**. Asset transfer[22] is something which has been a feature of county council activity for some time[23]. Interviewees, speaking to us about asset transfer, highlighted the dangers attached to a lack of consideration of the transfer of liabilities alongside assets, and the need for capacity-building support to be able to manage assets appropriately. There is a risk that asset transfer is seen as an example of local authorities dumping physical facilities on the local community if maintaining those facilities is difficult or expensive.
- **Activities relating to the county area's designation as a Marmot Place[24]** – creating duties that cut across a range of areas and services, including co-production in respect of certain aspects of adult and children's services (connected to the above).

Together these arrangements reflect a patchwork of overlapping relationships between councils and communities. This brings about some capacity-based risks, but the resulting messiness is not necessarily a bad thing. It reflects the reality of the way that communities and neighbourhoods actually exist and function. But complexity and messiness can, equally, make the landscape difficult to navigate for those individuals, and organisations,

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[21] See footnote 12 above

[22] Sometimes confused with the "Community Right to Bid", the formal process under the Localism Act 2011 which provides for local people to bid to take on responsibility for Assets of Community Value if their owner proposes to dispose of them. Modern approaches to asset transfer, meanwhile, date from the 2007 Quirk Review. More information can be found at https://mycommunity.org.uk/files/downloads/Download-Understanding-Community-Asset-Transfer.pdf

[23] Oxfordshire County Council has transferred around 80 buildings to community and voluntary groups since 2011. The council has stated that, "this is primarily as a result of significant service changes driven by austerity measures": https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/land-and-premises/community-assets

[24] We discuss this in its strategic context at section 1F

not already familiar with the community and council ecosystem.

By other organisations in Oxfordshire

We have not looked in detail at community engagement activity undertaken by other bodies, although we have reflected briefly on the consequences for neighbourhood working in the NHS. We think it is likely that further work will need to be done by principal councils, and other partners, to undertake some mapping to understand where some of the principal public service activities are that interact with local people. In particular, this is likely to involve reflection on policy areas like:

- **Policing and community safety**: where partners come together to take action on the kinds of visible measures that can support a sense of community, and the sense of risk and safety within that community;
- **Further education and higher education**: given the important role that such institutions play in the shaping of place, from the perspective of local people's life chances and the wider economy;
- **The social security system, including JobCentre+**.

1F: Summarising Oxfordshire's needs

A future model of neighbourhood governance will need to engage with the existing models of how local people currently work together, and work with public institutions, to get things done – which is why we have started by looking at what things look like in the present.

Such a model will also need to engage with an understanding of the county area, its circumstances and requirements. We set some of these things out in Appendix B, where we review in more depth some of the wider public policy context for the area. Below, we briefly set out our findings on Oxfordshire's possible future, and our reflections on what this future might mean for the approach taken on neighbourhood governance.

Oxfordshire's future

Enterprise Oxfordshire's Strategic Economic Plan[25] highlights challenges around social inclusion – connected to "substantial disparities in relation to income and wealth". The

[25] We have used the Strategic Economic Plan as a way to frame our understand of Oxfordshire's likely future – but recognise that it is one plan, from one organisation, and that there are many other possible futures. One of the tasks for councils, their partners and local people as work on neighbourhood governance evolves will be to stake out a fuller sense of what the future for the county looks like through social, economic, cultural and other lens. "Strategic Economic Plan" (Enterprise Oxfordshire, 2023): https://www.enterpriseoxfordshire.com/what-we-do/strategies-plans-reports/strategic-economic-plan/

Strategy cites average household incomes of £48,000 in North Central Oxford compared to £26,300 in Blackbird Leys as evidence of particular disparities in Oxford itself, but evidence also exists of significant disparities elsewhere.

The fact that Oxfordshire is the 10th least deprived of the 151 upper tier authority areas in England[26] hides specific, localised deprivation – an extremely salient factor when considering the need, capacity and appetite for models of neighbourhood governance.

The Strategy says[27]:

> *"In the context of a county that can genuinely claim some of the world's foremost science and technology assets […] this juxtaposition sits very uncomfortably. Growth within Oxfordshire needs to be inclusive. It needs to be 'distributed across society and create opportunities for all' [Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2024-30]. This is a key goal for Oxfordshire."*

This presents a challenge to the design of neighbourhood governance arrangements – ensuring that they where possible provide an opportunity to share the fruits of growth, and that they provide an environment where discussion and decision-making about growth, and its consequences (positive and negative) for social fabric can be expanded.

As a place, Oxfordshire is undergoing significant change. There is ongoing pressure for housing growth, and further economic development. Enterprise Oxfordshire's strategies for growth and development are framed around inclusion and sustainability; this needs to be squared with pressure for physical development – the construction of new housing, new business premises and the infrastructure to support it.

Alongside these plans are those owned by other organisations – jointly and separately. Documents such as the joint strategic needs assessment[28] (JSNA) provide the basis for partnership planning on health and care matters – plans that are closely aligned to those relating to economic growth. Oxfordshire is a Marmot Place, with the county council having recently launched cross-partnership plans to contribute to the wider determinants of health by taking forward plans to reduce health inequalities. Objectives are linked to both social inclusion and economic development – highlighting the close links between the two and the need for an approach for community development that links closely to inclusive growth.

This in turn contributes to Government, and local, plans for public service reform – the idea of knitting together partners and partnerships in order to ensure a common understanding of the strengths and weaknesses, enablers and constraints, of the community infrastructure of the area.

There is a general vision, associated with public sector partners across the area, about the way in which growth across Oxfordshire can be managed in such a way as to be inclusive,

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[26] At the time of the publication of the Strategy (November 2023)
[27] SEP, p22
[28] Accessible in electronic, interactive form at the Oxfordshire Data Hub: https://data.oxfordshire.gov.uk/jsna/

sustainable and equitable, inasmuch as growth can be a driver for the reduction of social disparities.

What Oxfordshire's future means for neighbourhood governance

The vision of a possible future set out in the Strategic Economic Plan (and reflected in other strategy documents) connects strongly and directly to new councils' objectives around neighbourhood governance and locality working. Growth is about large-scale spatial planning (which may, in due course, be owned and overseen by a strategic authority covering a wider area than Oxfordshire alone). But it must also be about the intensely local activity which contributes to community capacity and capabilities. Sustainable growth that works across the area will not be possible without a corresponding growth in civic and social infrastructure.

Arising from this, we think that some of the key needs that Oxfordshire has in relation to future neighbourhood governance are:

- **Interconnectedness with wider public service objectives.** Broad public service priorities across Oxfordshire are deeply interconnected — and closely tied to the resilience of local communities and neighbourhoods. We believe there is a compelling case that investing in neighbourhood governance is also an investment in the wider goals of inclusive economic growth, tackling deprivation, and improving life chances. Strengthening neighbourhood governance helps to build the social fabric that underpins these outcomes — by enabling resilient, self-supporting communities to take a more active role in shaping the places they live in.

- **Messiness.** Sustainable arrangements for community action within neighbourhoods look messy. Different arrangements operate in different areas and while a degree of "mapping" might be both desirable and possible, trying to sketch out the way that councils (principal and local) and communities relate to each other now, and how they might relate to each other in future, is difficult to do comprehensively. The presence of messiness reflects the fact that neighbourhood governance arrangements are not ones that can be easily "held" by a new principal authority or authorities. Community activity is organic and reflects the places within which it operates – neighbourhood systems operated by councils and other public sector bodies needs to fit around that existing reality.

- **Informal vs formal.** Some community action happens through formal means – legal, public decision-making, formal partnerships and agreements, and activities undertaken by formally constituted bodies that often hold specific accountabilities to local people. Much more is informal in nature. The "formal" activity often supports the informal in ways that are not apparent to policymakers and decision-makers. This leads to an environment of strength where different aspects of community activity are self-supporting but also paradoxically, weakness - where if one part of the ecosystem weakens suddenly (because of a loss of funding or because a key individual leaves) other parts of the ecosystem may begin to weaken in ways that

can be unpredictable.

- **Asymmetry as a core feature.** Asymmetry – the idea that different areas have different needs, and so the nature of the services provided to them will be different - is a fundamental part of neighbourhood governance. Different parts of the local ecosystem operate with varying levels of capability, legitimacy, and ambition — even among larger town councils, there is no single, shared understanding of purpose or role. Any attempt to devolve power or responsibility uniformly across an area is likely to fall short. In contrast, an approach that embraces asymmetry recognises the need for councils to support community activity in flexible, tailored ways, responding to the distinct contexts and capacities of each place. This means building from where capability and energy already exist and demonstrating the value of that engagement by visibly reinvesting the dividends of success from local action back into those communities.

- **Consistency.** There is a need for certain services to be delivered consistently across the area, and for some services to be subject to the formality associated with a rules-based system backed by a clear understanding of legal requirements. This is particularly the case for personal services that are built around rights and entitlements set out in statute, but also those services provided universally. This needs to sit alongside the asymmetry that defines the wider system.

- **Capacity building** is necessary to support existing community activity where it is happening – reflecting a strengths-based approach to support and local resilience. We have been told that while grant funding is available for a variety of community projects, long-term capacity building opportunities are not always present. Recommissioning and decommissioning of certain services (including by organisations beyond local government) can have a significant, negative (and unexpected) consequence for community resilience. For us, the need to build and maintain community capacity is an important part of meaningful neighbourhood governance.

- **Visibility.** No-one should expect to be able to have a view of all community activity, and all activity happening in neighbourhood, across the entire county area. But there needs to be an awareness of the presence of a wider ecosystem around community activity that acknowledges the messiness and asymmetry that we describe above, as well as other characteristics. This requires a limited amount of mapping. At the most local level, those working in and around communities (and in parishes) may not currently understand the wider ecosystem either – this is not necessarily a problem but is something that might need to be addressed if wider aspirations for neighbourhood governance take flight, and greater neighbourhood-level grip of civic infrastructure is desired or seen to be needed.

- **Mindset, attitude and culture.** Amongst professionals, there is likely to be a need to shift behaviours around engagement, participation and communication with local neighbourhoods – fostering a greater spirit of trust and mutual honesty and joining

up professional-led activity.

- **Community intelligence.** The evidence we've gathered highlights the powerful role of community intelligence, at the most local level, in shaping solutions that are closely attuned to the specific needs of neighbourhoods. This kind of insight — grounded in lived experience and local relationships — can surface nuances that may be missed by even the most skilled professionals working at a distance. When shared, this intelligence doesn't just inform better decision-making; it also builds collective understanding of local challenges and creates a stronger foundation for co-produced solutions.

2. Exploring what others do

This part of the paper explores some of the possible approaches that are available, and that have been adopted in the UK and further afield. It uses an exploration of those possibilities to draw out some general principles about what makes strong, sustainable neighbourhood governance work.

2A: Examples from the UK

New approaches to neighbourhood governance following local government reorganisation

New parishes. Recent local government reorganisations have seen the establishment of sometimes very large new parish/town councils in previously unparished urban areas.

The largest parish council in the country by population is Northampton Town Council, with 130,000 residents. The council was created at the same time as the reorganisation of Northamptonshire, which created two new unitary authorities. Other parish councils created alongside reorganisation include Shrewsbury and Salisbury.

Case study: Salisbury, a new city council

In Salisbury, a new city council was established at the same time as the local government reorganisation in Wiltshire in 2009. The population of the area served by the council is around 40,000.

The council holds responsibility for some service delivery, as well as playing an important role in local place-shaping through two mechanisms:

- A Neighbourhood Development Plan. This Plan was developed by the council and adopted by way of a local referendum into Wiltshire Council's planning framework in early 2025.
- The Salisbury Place Partnership, an unincorporated voluntary partnership bringing together public and private sectors in the interests of managing the city centre and the city's cultural offer. The Partnership is advisory, with no ability to drive the policies of its individual members, but there is an expectation that resources and activities will be aligned with plans and priorities agreed collectively.

Other approaches to neighbourhood governance and locality working. In many parts of the country, reorganisation has provoked councils to establish new arrangements for locality

working, and to foster connection between new authorities and the communities they serve. These arrangements will often build on previous practice, and tend to involve setting up committees or forums that have duties and responsibilities that reflect a traditional "area committee" model, like the one we describe later in this section. Success in making these arrangements meaningful hinges on the extent to which expectations around community engagement, and empowerment, are baked into the fundamental operating model of a new authority. This is a challenge, when the focus on "safe and legal" transition of services can lead create a risk that new councils adopt "minimum viable" approaches rather than pursuing creativity and innovation.

Case study: post-LGR locality arrangements in Buckinghamshire

Central to Buckinghamshire's approach to reorganisation was the establishment of arrangements for local members to take decisions, and for communities to have their say, through a set of **community boards.** The vision for these boards was to improve outcomes outcomes for residents through ensuring strong connections between the Council and the people it serves.

Local insight and intelligence is used to set priorities for boards to take forward – boards produce reports, and carry out projects. Each board has a dedicated Chair and Vice-Chair (with wider membership being comprised of local people), and a Board Manager whose job it is to ensure that links are forged with local people.

Wider locality working arrangements

The establishment of new locality arrangements is not unique to councils going through reorganisation. Across the country the approaches taken to locality working are however different from council to council.

In some places, localities offer a convenient way of dividing up operational delivery arrangements. In others, locality working involves the creation of local teams, which may be embedded in the local community specifically to provide community support or capacity, and to ensure that "low level" operational, place-based matters are dealt with effectively.

Locality arrangements are common on social housing estates, where estate offices (and housing officers) have sometimes become unofficial nodes for community activity because social landlords have responsibility for a significant amount of the built environment. In this model, housing officers may have wider duties relating to person-centred services; some estates may contain sheltered housing units or other care facilities whose presence might support this person-centred focus.

Area / ward committees

Councils in many parts of the country have established area or ward committees, with a

variety of functions. These kinds of committees went through a brief phase of popularity in the 1990s and 2000s, and at the time had powers such as:

- The power to make grants, up to a certain value;
- The power to spend a limited "ward budget" on operational services – usually universal "clean and green" activity or cultural and community activity;
- The power to make certain planning decisions.

These committees have sometimes provided a space for more general discussion of local priorities, which may involve local partners. For example, they can provide a space for agreement on local community safety priorities, and an opportunity for partners to come together to engage with local people. As we noted above the establishment of these kinds of bodies often forms a part of wider local government reorganisation.

Area committees can, however, feel formal – and sometimes toothless. They are traditional mechanisms for engagement that many councils have found to be of limited utility. Furthermore, the use of area committees of this type has become less common in the past decade or so, principally because of financial constraints but also because of concerns in some councils that money allocated to committees to undertake their work was not always being spent wisely.

Case study: Tower Hamlets neighbourhoods experiment

Although it happened a long time ago, probably the most significant and long-lived experiment in total decentralisation, and a push for almost all service delivery down to the most local level, was in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets under the 1986-1994 Liberal administration[29].

Under this model seven Neighbourhoods were created, each to be run by a separate local committee. Each Neighbourhood had its own CEO, and its own staff complement, and was provided with the budget to deliver the bulk of local services itself with some residual functions still being delivered corporately.

Contemporary, independent evaluations found a significant improvement in resident satisfaction arising from this radical decentralisation but problems with regard to control and central grip on area-wide services. A weak centre, overall, had contributed to inefficiencies especially with regard to services that might have been better left centralised[30].

[29] Summarised in "The Tower Hamlets Neighbourhoods 1986-1994" at https://lccmunicipal.com/2017/07/12/rediscovering-the-tower-hamlets-neighbourhoods-part-1/ , summarising earlier research undertaken by David Rosenberg, Janice Morphet, Vivien Lowndes and Gerry Stoker.

[30] This work happened at a time when councils' corporate cores did not look as they do now, and service departments are generally considered to have held significantly more power.

Case study: District electoral areas (DEAs) in Northern Ireland

Each of the 11 unitary council areas in Northern Ireland (except Belfast) is divided into 7 district electoral areas (DEAs). DEAs are a long-standing feature in Northern Ireland's local government geography. DEAs are made up of multiple wards, and are necessary because local government elections are conducted using proportionate representation rather than first past the post (FPTP). Arrangements for the boundaries and naming of DEAs has been handled by a DEA Commissioner, an independent appointment.

DEAs are the basis for data gathering and statistical analysis below council level, but also provide a basis for councillor leadership on issues of local importance.

For example in **Antrim and Newtownabbey** the DEAs are used as the basis for consultation and engagement in the council's community planning process, whereby a range of local and regional organisations and agencies have come together to determine how services can be delivered better together. Each DEA has a "Place Shaping Forum" which uses statistics and local insight to identify DEA-specific priorities for the Community Plan, which have then been recommended to the Community Planning Partnership for action[31].

2B: Examples from outside the UK

Reviewing approaches to neighbourhood governance in non-UK jurisdictions requires caution. The political culture of other countries, and the weave of those countries' social fabric, will be very different. Legal frameworks differ substantially. However, although examples from overseas may not be easy to transpose wholesale, there will be lessons from their design and implementation that are likely to be useful for policymaking in the UK.

Some of these examples relate to formal structures and relationships – in others, the focus is on the building of capacity for informal, organic relationship building. In all cases, however, there is a common theme – the integration of more distributed and decentralised ways of working into the heart of organisations' formal governance arrangements.

- **Incorporated and unincorporated areas (USA)[32]**. In the USA, all areas are covered by state-level and county-level government, but not all areas benefit from city or

[31] This could be seen as an example in practice of some of the citizen science principles discussed on the next page.
[32] See, for example, Leon-Moreta A, "Municipal incorporation in the United States" (2015) Urban Studies 52(16) 3160-3180

municipal governance. Those that do not are "unincorporated" areas, where services are provided directly by the county. When an area is "incorporated", it gains greater power to plan, direct and delivery its own services – incorporation therefore provides greater control and autonomy over services to local people. In the USA, incorporation also brings with it the power to bring in its own tax revenue for service delivery. This is an example of where local government can be asymmetric – ie, where certain parts of a wider area can benefit from local government systems that enjoy a greater sense of local control.

- **Agglomeration communities (communautés d'agglomération) (France)[33]**. These are one of a number of grouping models for communes, the smallest unit of French local governance. Under these arrangements communes may create a new legal structure – an agglomeration – that takes on those powers (and income from taxes) that individual communes decide to delegate. It is a similar process to grouping, but more formal in nature and directed towards specific service delivery objectives around economic development (and connected matters).

- **Digital micro-governance (Taiwan)**. Taiwans approach to digital engagement through platfoms such as https://join.gov.tw/ offers a compelling example of how digital infrastructure can support hyper local participatory democracy. The platform enables citizens to submit policy ideas, crowdsource proposals and co-create solutions with local and national government. It is an example of how digital tools can enable continuous participation and relational accountability.

- **Participatory budgeting at scale (Spain, Brazil)[34].** The Porto Allegre example of participatory budgeting has long been a fixture of social research literature[35]. Having begun in 1989, the process involves three streams of meetings:

  - Neighbourhood assemblies, which meet to discuss budget allocations for specific areas across the city .

  - City-wide assemblies, which deal with non-neighbourhood specific issues.

  - Meetings of the Council of the Participatory Budget, consisting of district delegates, which meets to consider recommendations from neighbourhood and city-wide assemblies, considered against the parameters set by the city government previously, and which then submits an agreed position to elected councillors for approval.

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[33] "Qu'est-ce qu'une communauté d'agglomération?" French Government (in French): https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/20126-quest-ce-quune-communaute-dagglomeration

[34] Case study on the Local Government Association website (2016): https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/case-study-porto-alegre-brazil

[35] Although open budgeting was trialled by several English councils it has not become a consistent feature of how councils manage their budget arrangements. A number of reasons have been suggested for this – the cost of the exercise, the limited discretion that English local authorities have on budget allocations and a sense that it significantly constrains the ability of an authority's political leadership to set its own direction, reflective of its electoral mandate.

2C: Inclusive methods for design, decision-making and delivery

Many public bodies have moved away from a purely "extractive" approach to consultation and engagement (one that gathers insight and intelligence from local people to be analysed by professionals), towards one that is more inclusive and mutually supportive (where people collaborate to find and agree on collective futures). In this section we explore the practical ways of working that can support a continuation of this kind of approach, and that effective neighbourhood governance might be able to support.

Neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood planning is a statutory process by which local people can play a role in shaping the areas in which they live and work[36]. Neighbourhood plans form part of a principal authority's development plan, which gives a neighbourhood plan force as an important factor in determining planning applications.

Neighbourhood planning benefits from an incentive, in that communities that draw up a plan and secure agreement in a local referendum can benefit from 25% of the revenue from the community infrastructure levy (CIL) arising from development in the area.

Government used to provide support to areas taking forward Neighbourhood Plans through a grants process administered by the charity Locality, but chose to withdraw this support in early 2025.

Citizen science

Citizen science – research conducted with the participation of the public – can provide the means to ensure that there is an understanding of the needs of an area, what services and support it needs, and how that support should be delivered, through a deeper understanding of that area's features (and the features of those living in that area).

Case study: citizen science and the natural world

Citizen science has long been a feature of research into the natural world. Records of temperature and weather conditions, and conditions of flora and fauna, have for many years been gathered and aggregated at national level to provide a sense of the health of the natural landscape.

Some councils have adopted similar mechanisms to ensure that they understand

[36] Government guidance can be found at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2

biodiversity: Test Valley Borough Council is a good example[37]. The Environment Agency is currently leading work nationally to explore how citizen science can be used to support research into the natural world more systematically[38].

In helping to map out areas, their needs and their strengths, citizen science has the potential to help public bodies to rethink the way that public services are designed. There is developing practice globally on the use of citizen science to support understanding of local health and care needs; the use of the model to describe and better understand "place" is more well-developed.

Co-production

There are a huge range of approaches that councils and communities can take towards the co-production of services. In the UK co-production is a tool of long standing of the health and care sector, allowing patients and other service users to help to design services. Co-production is specifically mentioned in statutory guidance to the Care Act 2014, and as such has made significant inroads as one of the dominant methods of policymaking in that sector in the past decade – though it has made less impression in some other policy areas.

Case study: co-production and adult social care

In 2022 the Adult Social Care Committee of the House of Lords, having been established for this express purpose, published a report on reforms to adult social care. The report investigated in detail practices on co-production and had this to say about the way in which area-based co-production of adult social care services was maturing around the country[39]:

"Local Area Coordination (LAC) has existed in England and Wales for over 10 years, and there are now [as at 2022] 12 local authorities across England and Wales that have implemented it. The LAC Network relies on Local Area Coordinators, who are employed by local councils and work across neighbourhoods of approximately 10,000 people. Coordinators are integrated into the local community: they have hyper-local knowledge of people, families, groups, organisations and services. Their role consists of approaching individuals who might have care and support needs, or be at risk of needing support, and to help them build their own vision for a better life, with the objective of drawing on personal, family and community resources to find pragmatic solutions to any challenges

[37] More information can be found at https://www.testvalley.gov.uk/aboutyourcouncil/corporatedirection/environmentandsustainability/citizen-science
[38] The Citizen Science Technical Advisory Framework: https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2025/03/18/citizen-science-and-the-environment-agency/
[39] "A gloriously ordinary life: spotlight on adult social care" (House of Lords, 2022): https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/580/adult-social-care-committee/publications/

they face.

"For example, one case study in Derby City Council saw a resident get in touch with a Local Area Coordinator because she was dealing with various physical and mental health issues following the recent loss of her husband. After several conversations, an opportunity to improve her life emerged as it became clear that she had enjoyed looking after her garden with her husband but was not capable of gardening anymore due to her declining health. The Coordinator arranged for her to meet with a local resident who they had also been helping, and who had been looking for opportunities to volunteer. They agreed to help with her gardening, in an arrangement that also resulted in both residents feeling less socially isolated."

There are examples of co-production in other areas but use is more scattergun. For example, in 2022 Toynbee Hall published the product of a participatory action research project on adult education in London[40]. This work involved a group of peer researchers with direct lived experience co-designing and co-producing the research project which involved in-depth interviews with people from across London. This demonstrates the cut-across between this way of working and citizen science, as discussed in the previous section.

Co-production, inevitably, takes resource. The quid pro quo in the spending of this resource is that services, once designed in this way, are significantly more attuned to the needs of those who those services are meant to support. In relation to health and care, co-production arrangements are closely aligned to the design and delivered of methods of working designed to tackle health inequalities.

Deliberative methods

Citizens' assemblies and citizens' juries are among the most well-known deliberative practices in the UK. These offer structured opportunities for a randomly selected group of residents to engage deeply in a policy area's 'wicked issue'. Unlike traditional consultation, which often captures a snapshot of opinion, these processes are designed to deepen understanding, build consensus, and develop collective judgment. Participants hear evidence, deliberate together, and make informed recommendations. They are particularly useful in areas where there is no easy consensus, or where legitimacy and trust in decision-making needs to be rebuilt.

Increasingly, some areas are exploring how to move beyond one-off events and embed these processes more permanently. This includes the idea of **deliberative committees** — standing bodies that pair residents and elected members in ongoing, structured dialogue. One pioneering example is in Belgium, where the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region has created formal deliberative committees that enable citizens and politicians to work

[40] "More than just education: a participatory action research project on adult education in London" (Toynbee Hall, 2022): https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/TH-GLA-Adult-Education-Report-Feb22-Digital.pdf

together on policy proposals.

Case study: Deliberative committees in Brussels, Belgium

In 2019, the Parliament of the Brussels-Capital Region introduced a groundbreaking model of democratic innovation by embedding deliberative committees directly into its parliamentary structure. This reform followed calls to tackle democratic fatigue and rebuild trust between citizens and institutions, and it aimed to create a formal space for citizens and elected representatives to deliberate together on key issues.

Each committee is composed of 15 parliamentarians and 45 citizens, randomly selected via a civic lottery to reflect the diversity of the population — including age, gender, ethnicity, education level, and geographic spread. The citizen members are compensated for their time, receive briefing materials, and are supported by independent facilitators and expert speakers to ensure they can meaningfully engage.

Committees meet over several sessions (typically four to six), during which members learn about the topic, discuss options, and co-develop a set of recommendations. These are then submitted to the full parliament and relevant ministers, who are required to formally respond — creating a clear line of accountability and influence.

Unlike one-off citizens' assemblies, these committees are ongoing, institutionalised mechanisms for participatory policymaking. Their integration within the legislative process ensures that deliberation is not just advisory but linked to formal decision-making — offering a bold example of how participatory and representative democracy can be woven together.

2D: Reflecting on what makes neighbourhood governance work

We think that the evidence set out across this section highlights three main areas which contribute to effective neighbourhood governance.

Shifts in behaviour

Evidence from elsewhere suggests that moving to a more purposefully designed approach to local places (in how places are shaped, how decisions are made, and how services are delivered) requires more than structural reform. It requires behavioural shifts – as we have noted in earlier sections.

These shifts involve public service professionals stepping into the spaces where communities already operate — developing a deeper, more holistic understanding of civic

infrastructure, and working collaboratively to respond to local needs and opportunities.

But these shifts are not easy. Behaviour change is simple to describe but difficult to achieve. It hinges on how councils perceive and manage risk. Ceding power and creating greater local autonomy can be seen as threatening the coherence of public service delivery, raising concerns about fragmentation or inconsistency — especially where councils remain legally responsible for ensuring the quality and equity of statutory services.

Ensuring central democratic control and oversight

This brings us to a core tension. How do we empower neighbourhoods meaningfully while maintaining system-wide integrity and accountability – in particular, accountability for democratically-elected politicians who have been elected to represent local people?

The solution lies not in resisting asymmetry or retreating to create more systems of control, but in developing a clear and shared framework for neighbourhood governance.

Such a framework must provide certainty, consistency, and transparency — not only in how decisions are made and services delivered, but also in where responsibility lies. It should guard against past mistakes, such as poorly planned asset transfers that pushed liabilities onto under-resourced community groups.

Control systems are necessary, but they should be light-touch and enabling, not bureaucratic and restrictive. The behavioural shift required is not simply about councils stepping back, but about working differently: investing in community capability, sharing power responsibly, and recognising that investment and commitment to neighbourhood governance is necessary for public bodies' wider objectives to be deliverable.

"Docking in" new arrangements with existing, more traditional, parts of the governance landscape

Local participation must be meaningful, enduring, and taken seriously. That means not treating community-led governance as an optional extra or one-off experiment but embedding it into how a council makes decisions.

To achieve that, participatory and neighbourhood governance must be able to 'dock into' formal systems of public decision-making. This isn't about limiting local agency — it's about giving it weight, status, and permanence. If communities are to play a real role in shaping places, decisions flowing from that involvement need to have legitimacy in the eyes of the law and the wider public.

CfGS explored this issue in depth between 2020 and 2022, in research part-funded by the JRSST Charitable Trust[41]. Our central argument was that if councils are to reimagine their relationship with local people, they must also reimagine how those relationships connect to

[41] Available to access, alongside separate downloadable guidance material, at https://www.cfgs.org.uk/governancerisk/

the legal and constitutional structures that underpin local authority governance. This led to a paper intended to provoke further debate on the topic.

These structures matter. The rule of law, delegated authority, and formal oversight exist to ensure that decisions are made with transparency, accountability, and proper regard for all relevant considerations. But they should not be seen as barriers to participation — they should be scaffolding that supports and secures it.

Those arrangements are there because they are the best way we have to offer real assurance that decisions are made that take into account all relevant considerations – and that those decisions are subject to meaningful oversight and accountability.

The relational constitution

Central to the principles behind "docking in" is the need, at the local level, to be able to specify what the relationships should be between traditional governance arrangements and new systems for deliberation, co-production and co-design.

All councils are obliged to agree a constitution to set out the way that it will function as an institution. We have suggested an evolved model – a "relational" constitution – that seeks to explore and define how the council will work with its partners, and the local community – setting out clear, consistent and transparent rules and arrangements.

A relational constitution would therefore not just be about how the council makes decisions but about how people from across the area (and public service partners) come together to deliberate and decide.

We consider that a prerequisite to making a meaningful approach to neighbourhood governance "stick" would be to ensure that its practical arrangements are described, in some detail, in such a document.

We have published more information about relational constitutions at https://www.cfgs.org.uk/resource/relational-constitutions-a-provocation-for-rethinking-local-governance/

3. Exploring the possibilities for Oxfordshire

In this final section, we consider what principles should underpin councils' and communities' next steps, and the different options that might be considered as part of the ensuing conversations.

In undertaking this work we wanted to leave policymakers and local people in Oxfordshire with a possible draft framework within which a variety of models of neighbourhood governance might be built.

What we have done below is to:

- Set out a range of **design principles** which we have extracted from the outcomes of our research and which we feel meet the overall needs for neighbourhood governance in Oxfordshire.
- Set out a **single possible framework** for the future, in some detail, with its pros and cons. This is informed by a clear sense of what a "neighbourhood" and an "area" is – with the geography being an important component in making new arrangements work properly. This single framework is one in which various different models and approaches to neighbourhood governance – as discussed in this report – could comfortably fit, depending on local appetite.
- Set out some **further models and options** for citizens and policymakers to explore their thinking on this topic.

Our framework – built out from Government's preferred approach of neighbourhood/area committees – is designed to draw together threads from our research to form something that is both holistic but also, we hope, sufficiently tangible for it to provoke action.

We then take the outcome of this exercise and apply it to the city of Oxford, in part 4.

3A: Design principles

Informing the eventual design of a framework needs to sit a set of design principles. These derive both from our research and from wider learning presented elsewhere in this report. They are not, we think, a conclusive description of all of the most important issues in play. Instead, they represent a first attempt at setting out something comprehensive, which will need to be subjected to further refinement as part of a wider, local conversation about these issues:

- **Supporting the legitimacy and role of elected politicians.** Representative democracy is the central bulwark of our democratic system. Any approach to strengthen neighbourhood governance will need to give elected councillors – at principal and

parish level – a central role.

- **A rules-based approach.** Public institutions need to work consistently and transparently. This is particularly important when needs and appetites for services and local interventions will be quite different from area to area. Transparency will be needed to avoid the risk that this kind of asymmetry is seen as favouritism.

- **Effective management and ownership of risk.** Neighbourhood governance involves, in part, services being designed and delivered with local people. But as this happens there needs to be a way of ensuring who is ultimately responsible for those services, including the risks attached to them. Without such clarity, neighbourhood-based decision-making could cloud where responsibility really lies. Arrangements will need to be made to ensure that risk and liability is not devolved to individuals and groups ill-equipped to manage it – that capacity, resource and support is provided with risk and need being central considerations.

- **Framed around public service partnership.** One of the benefits of existing arrangements for neighbourhood working is that they can be very effective at bringing together partners at a very local level. Through designation as a Marmot Place, the county wants to expand on this capability; there is a recognition (through Community Action Groups and other mechanisms) that there is a need to strengthen this approach, and neighbourhood governance systems can and should be a facilitator.

- **A strengths-based approach building on what already exists.** We have discussed how in areas across the county, a huge variety of arrangements exist for neighbourhood and community activity, some of it supported by principal authorities but much of it not. Arrangements will need to maintain the ecosystem of neighbourhood governance where it is already strong and bolster it where it isn't – reflecting our earlier findings on asymmetry. The focus will need to be on the strengthening of the connective tissue associated with neighbourhood-based activity rather than necessarily "doing more" of that activity – thereby increasingly community resilience. This is why we see this work strengthening and deepening the commitments made by councils across the area through the Oxfordshire Charter.

- **Providing opportunity for debate and discussion on tensions and tradeoffs, anchored in neighbourhood planning**. A big challenge for the county area is management of the tensions and disagreements arising from growth and development. We have noted the way that this had caused challenges in Oxfordshire, a rural county under significant housing need pressure. Whatever neighbourhood governance arrangements look like, we think that they should be anchored in neighbourhood planning – a process with statutory definition that will help local areas to manage these tensions and tradeoffs, and place them in a wider context.

- **County-wide consistency, but with significant local divergence.** This sounds contradictory – and it is. Local people will need to think carefully about how they

manage the tension between what at first sight seem like two contradictory aims. On the one hand it would be unfair and inequitable (and in some cases illegal) for principal authorities to offer services on a dramatically differential basis depending on geography. On the other hand it is right that public services flex to meet local need and capacity. The presence of strong neighbourhood governance arrangements should be able to hold these two competing demands equally.

Acknowledging enablers and constraints within principal authorities

The adoption of a sustainable approach to neighbourhood governance will require agreement on the presence of enablers and constraints within councils, and how people will work together to manage them.

Enablers and constraints primarily relate to **culture and behaviours**. Cultural attitudes towards neighbourhood governance inform and influence things like the resources that principal authorities might be prepared to invest in the system, and the extent to which public service partners are willing to design (or redesign) their ways of working in order to accommodate the need for greater local control and direction.

Critically this is about changes in behaviours and attitudes within principal authorities – not about requiring that those now doing work in neighbourhoods and communities should change the way that they work in order to accommodate the needs and preference of those already in positions of power and authority.

3B: Defining neighbourhoods and areas

Government has stated their aspiration for neighbourhood/area committees to be the default option for new authorities to wire a connection to local communities.

Conventionally these might have been committees designed to work in the old style – some light grant-making, periodic meetings to discuss local concerns, perhaps semi-regular attendance by the police or other external partners. This would not be a particularly exciting model but would probably be the "minimum viable" approach.

We have in mind something quite different. In order to explain it we need to first explain what a "neighbourhood" and an "area" are.

Defining a neighbourhood

There is a circularity about the way that a "neighbourhood" might be defined for the governance purposes we talk about in this report.

On the one hand, knowing first what a "neighbourhood" is helps us to then think about what the most appropriate arrangements might be for its governance. On the other hand, understanding the powers and rights that we might consider when we think about neighbourhood governance helps us to determine what form we should associate with

those functions.

For us, therefore, we think that neighbourhoods – their identity and who they serves – should be a matter for local people to define. Some services and relationships may coalesce around towns and their immediate hinterlands – we know that this idea of controversial for some. However, we feel that trying to redesign things (services, especially) around very small geographies is likely to be difficult.

In short, we ultimately think that form should follow function – and that, following our principles around messiness, the "neighbourhood" as a unit for delivery, and a unit for dialogue and democracy, may be different for different issues.

Defining an area

We have concluded that "neighbourhoods" are multifaceted and cut across different geographies. A principal council needs to organise itself in such a way that helps it to engage with those within those neighbourhoods.

For this purpose we think there is value in considering a geographical unit which provides the link between the neighbourhood governance that we have discussed in this paper and with area-wide council services. We think that the geography of these new area committees – which we have explored below – can be at a geographic scale larger than a ward, or multiple wards – and by so being can offer a sustainable model as a permanent, formal body. In the absence of a better word we would describe these units as "areas". An areas would cover a large number of geographically-overlapping and more loosely-defined neighbourhoods.

We have seen a number of different ideas about how lines for these areas should be drawn. If we are to determine that area committees, as established, will be responsible for supporting and enabling activity in local neighbourhoods, rather than as nodes for decision-making and delivery themselves, the geography is we think less important (but still important in relative terms). We discuss some possible options in the next section.

3C: The area committee

Introducing a reinvented "area committee"

The work of this paper is not to make specific recommendations. One option for us would have been to lay out a wide range of structural options and their pros and cons. But we felt that delving into one specific option in more detail – and unpicking some of its mechanics – would offer an opportunity for more reflective analysis.

This option is the establishment of a number of area committees[42] – fulfilling Government's expectations – with those committees acting as catalysts, enablers and supporters of existing and future community activity. In this model area committees are a kind of highly localised anchor institution, providing the capacity and support needed to strengthen the neighbourhood governance that we talked about earlier in this report. To carry out this role these committees would need to be supported by a part of a new council that we have called a "Neighbourhood Unit".

In presenting this option here and in the sections below, we want to emphasise that we are doing so as an illustration of one potential approach, and as a way of exploring what some of the practical considerations would be that would attach to any future model of neighbourhood governance.

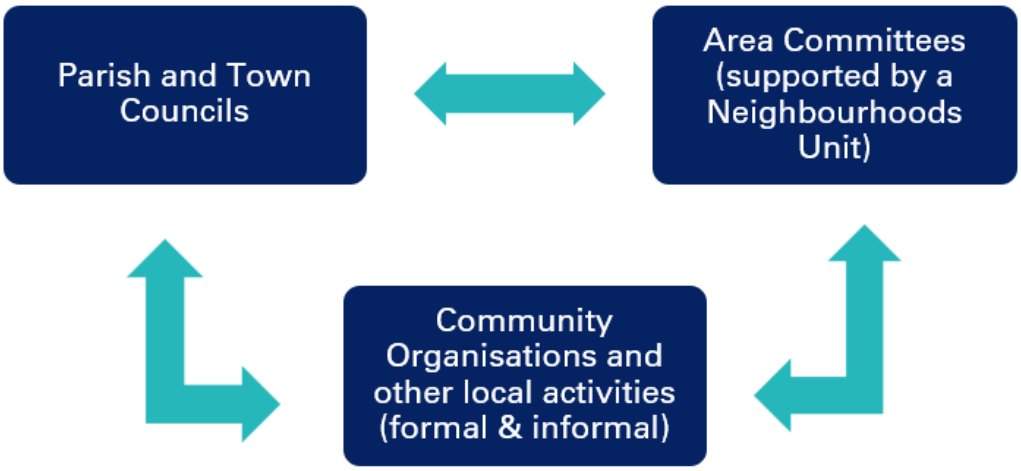


Illustration of core relationships. Arrows denote flows of insight and intelligence, and resource and support.

Area committees would enjoy a particularly close relationship with parish councils, as democratic partners and as institutions which area committees could themselves support – while ensuring that parishes retain their independence. Under this model (and, indeed, others) area committees could foster an environment in which parishes within the area could be supported to enter into formal "grouping" arrangements – probably at a smaller scale than the whole area though.

The work of area committees would be focused on supporting and enabling neighbourhood and community activity, although we think it is possible that they might play a role in some decision-making and oversight on operational service delivery (which we describe in more detail below).

They would be able to draw on officer support to make available capacity, and skills, to

[42] Which would be committees of a new authority or authorities.

engage in the kinds of locally focused activities that we have discussed earlier in this report. They would in providing long-term, consistent support remove some of the administrative burden which smaller groups and organisations feel exist where they want to take more responsibility for local issues, and local services. In this way we see area committees acting as **civic infrastructure bodies**, supporting, bolstering and growing community action at the most local level.

In doing this, they would also play an important role liaising with and engaging with parish and town councils – as key partners where they already hold capacity and capability, and as sources of support where they may lack capacity but have ambition to do more.

In the sections below we explore exactly what work in each of these areas might look like.

We have discussed above the need for a framework that protects, supports and enables people to support their fellow residents at neighbourhood level. That framework is we think provided by area committees. In our model these committees would do three connected things, which echo and reinforce our descriptions of neighbourhood governance in part 1 of the report:

- **Mapping and understanding – seeking to develop a common understanding of the "place"**
- **Providing support, capacity and resource – being incubators for community activity**
- **Providing direction and oversight – on certain operational decisions, and on other matters**

These things would play into a central role for area committees in **holding, and anchoring, neighbourhood planning arrangements**. This work would provide a formal core of committee activity, around which wider community support would happen.

The model we wish to set out is one that sees area committees **primarily as enablers, conveners and overseers, rather than decision-makers in their own right**.

Their role would be about empowering and supporting others to take action, and in acting as a conduit for insight and intelligence between the local level and the wider area covered by a new council.

We consider that to make these bodies, or something like, them, formal decision-making bodies would risk doing the opposite to that which neighbourhood governance is intended to achieve. It might produce a system of "local centralisation", in which agile, dynamic community action is hobbled by the presence of an institution that – because decisions need to pass through it – acts as a throttle on innovation and capability, rather than as an enabler.

But this lack of "authority" means that some councillors – and others – might question the value in such committees' existence. We think that these competing interests are likely to need to be explored fully.

Function 1: neighbourhood planning

We have in mind a process where the statutory neighbourhood planning process is the framing device for the work and activity of area committees.

Neighbourhood planning can be held by individual parishes or across a wider geographic area. Whatever the geography, it involves reflecting on understanding that area, its needs, and how it might grow, change and develop in future.

Building stable communities is about:

- **general infrastructure** – schools, GP surgeries, shops and the people who staff them
- **civic infrastructure** – the community links we describe in this report.

We think that if area committees, or something like them, held and supported the neighbourhood planning process it would enable local people to work through, understand and act on the trade-offs inherent in growth and development, and to use discussion and deliberation to find a way through what is otherwise a complex and difficult process. It would marry together these two conceptions of infrastructure.

Two interviewees talked about how the views of local people, expressed through neighbourhood planning, could be used to "hold developers' feet to the fire" – which we understand is an important policy objective for those who see challenges around the provision of infrastructure to support development.

Function 2: Mapping and understanding

We have already set out the wide range of community and neighbourhood-based action that takes place across a range of subject areas. An area committee could play a role in seeking to deepen understanding of where and how that activity happens – to identify gaps, constraints, strengths and areas where support might be needed.

Importantly, this work would also help to identify differing levels of appetite for different levels of council-supported community and neighbourhood activity, building the environment for the "asymmetric" approach we have described elsewhere.

Some of these constraints and challenges could be down to structural barriers that might not be immediately apparent to professional policymakers. Those with a greater understanding of local communities could help to explore those barriers – which might relate to the fact that people are from marginalised groups or hold protected characteristics under the Equality Act.

Using citizen science approaches, councillors, local organisations and local people could come together to explore these issues and find solutions. This approach would also allow people from across an area to understand each others' capabilities. Where possible and necessary this could involve supporting people, organisations and communities to reflect on the need for a more holistic understanding of how what they do links into the work of others.

We are conscious that not everyone would wish to be involved in these more "holistic"

discussions but being able to talk about who does what, and where, might help to spark interesting conversations about opportunities for greater alignment between people's work at the most local level.

In this way we think that area committees would be able to bring together "patch understanding" – a granular knowledge of a local area – with wider awareness of the "system" at a more strategic level, provided by officers and other professionals.

Function 3: Providing support, capacity and resources

With existing arrangements across an area mapped, and understood, to the greatest extent possible, area committees would be able to understand what work they might need to do in order to enhance local capacity and resilience at the neighbourhood level.

We know from the evidence we have gathered that small amounts of resource can seed significant community activity, but councils are likely to need to do further research to understand how and where money can be invested most wisely (mapping, as discussed above, may help with this).

Providing capacity is necessary to avoid risks where individuals, or small groups of individuals, carrying out important community support activities leave their roles – whether due to a change in personal circumstance or something else. It is a way of enhancing resilience, and spreading risk, by supporting community arrangements to move away from models based on a small number of "hero leaders" who may be burdened with too much expectation around the work that they do.

Some capacity building can be managed on a peer-to-peer basis – it is not the case that resource and support will universally be provided by a council into local community organisations.

Resourcing a Neighbourhoods Unit

In order to carry out their work area committees would need to have meaningful officer resourcing. Although our expectation would be that building resilience and capability within neighbourhoods and communities would, over time, result in the strengthening of civic infrastructure, and the neighbourhood "ecosystem", in such a way as to pay back from that investment, there is no question that well into the medium term this would involve new councils making a substantial commitment to making these arrangements work.

At the moment a range of officers across the county and districts play a role in supporting co-production, community action and locality working. The creation of a relatively small Neighbourhoods Unit within new councils would be able to draw on (and better co-ordinate) some of that existing activity, bolstering it with new officers, to provide capacity to support growth in neighbourhood activity. This might involve (and this is not an

exhaustive list):

- Capacity-building support for asset transfer
- Assistance in accessing external funds to support local activity
- Help to link up complementary activity to support local people in different neighbourhoods and areas
- Supporting town and parish councils in the area
- Assistance in building new user-centred services and facilities

This support would need to be designed to complement that already offered and provided by sector support bodies like OALC (in respect of parish councils), Community First Oxfordshire and OCVA (in respect of third/voluntary sector bodies), as well as by individuals such as parish clerks.

The reason why we suggest that this officer support should be organised council-wide, rather than dedicated to individual areas / area committees, is to allow flexibility and to reduce the risk of siloing. Our sense is that this activity would be seen as corporate in nature rather than sitting in a specific service department. Individual area committees would draw down support from a central team in a way that would be transparent and accountable – based on the needs identified through the mapping exercise set out in the previous section.

Providing this support would involve careful handling and management. Advocacy organisations, which may benefit from support, might also seek to campaign against and oppose council action in certain areas. The provision of support and resource cannot be contingent on the support, tacit or explicit, of council policy in certain areas – equally, councils have to be careful not to use public resource to support lobbying activity. Ultimately, the council and local communities will have to determine the rules of engagement for this kind of support – which by definition would need to be more flexible and open-ended that support and resourcing currently provided, in order to achieve its objectives.

Importantly, this support would need to be explicitly framed around providing core support for organisations and local groups – supplementing and supporting ongoing project-based support where it exists. This meets the need, identified earlier, for central support on capacity.

In our view the presence of resource, capacity and support, through this mechanism or something quite like it, is a necessary element of making sure that neighbourhood governance can function effectively.

Function 4: Providing direction and oversight

There are a number of areas where area committees could provide direction and oversight over the work being carried out by others.

- Relating to the management of local services;
- Relating to the co-production and co-design of area-wide services;
- Relating to a more general community oversight role.

The management of local services. We want to set out, by way of illustration, what arrangements would look like for operational delivery and the role of area committees in supporting that delivery.

This is how the framework we have described accounts for asymmetry across the area, and differential demands and appetites for different approaches to governance. We think that what then sits within the framework is a clear menu for individual organisations and neighbourhoods to do more to support local people – an offer that says that where there is local appetite, the council through its area committees (and backed by officers) will support work to enable people within neighbourhoods to be able to meet those aspirations.

In this way area committees would be incubators for community and neighbourhood-based activity – supporting local people (including the individual "activators" who we have been told are so important in making things happen at local level) to navigate new ways of working either until they can become self-sustaining or until the council can put in place a long-term funding model for them.

This model of incubation removes the barrier which local people and organisations will inevitably face when wishing to extend and deepen some community action – the pressure to formalise work in order to access further funding and support.

Operational delivery supported by area committees

Area committees, under the framework we have described, would not be responsible for making detailed decisions on local operational issues themselves. But they would be responsible for supporting local delivery and ensuring that local people have an influence on those decisions made – by officers, executive-side councillors and others.

Here we set out what some of those areas could be where area committees could support ongoing influence over aspects of operational delivery. Again, we should stress that under this model it would not be area committees "doing" this activity – they would be supporting local people, in neighbourhoods, and other actors – like parish councils – to be able to have the capacity to do some of this work.

- Planning decision-making, including local determination on the use of CIL
- Infrastructure planning and provision, especially in the context of development
- Local transport activity
- Maintenance arrangements for parks and green spaces

- Community development, including youth services
- Flooding and flood risk
- Nature recovery
- Markets, festivals, leisure and cultural activities
- Burial grounds

This list deliberately mirrors the description of the kinds of services managed and delivered by some parish councils, and links to some of the existing engagement activity currently managed through OXTOG, CAGs and so on. As noted above area committees can provide a way of ensuring that this activity is well co-ordinated – and can assist parish councils to take on new services, and to manage their business in a different way, where there is the appetite to do so.

It mirrors the example of incorporated/unincorporated areas in the USA – that is, where parishes have the will, appetite and capability they can manage these services directly but where that does not exist, area committees may hold some of those services ready for them to be drawn down to the more local level when considered appropriate. This provides a clearer route for parishes to enhance and deepen the nature and level of services that they provide (either individually or through grouping) – but without an explicit expectation that they should do so.

Assisting in the co-production and co-design of county-wide services. We have discussed in earlier sections how co-production is an important part of some service design activity. Where such co-production activity is being carried out across a geographically wide area, area committees provide an opportunity to centre that activity in local places – and to provide a democratic anchor for those processes where they do happen.

Carrying out a more general community oversight role. A further potential role around decision-making would be to allow area committees to hold to account and oversee wider council locality working, area by area. There may be value in designing this kind of local "overview and scrutiny" powers into area committees to provide local people with the opportunity to more immediately hold to account decisions made in their name that have a specific local flavour.

Councillors might, through this process, have an input in local resource allocation – although no decision-making power. This would help to manage concerns over local infrastructure, and a way to assure a degree of equity in how the council and its partners use resources. This might come back to the idea that growth should benefit local communities in how assets are made use of – for example, influence over the management of the community infrastructure levy (CIL) and investment in local infrastructure to reflect the presence of particular pressures around housing (and other) development. This fits with our wider idea of area committees being anchored through the neighbourhood planning process.

3D: Practical arrangements for area committees

We have discussed the core components of area committees – what their roles might be, how they might be supported. Given those matters, we now turn to two complementary considerations – who would sit on these committees and what geographies they would cover.

What geography would area committees cover?

In establishing area committees to provide enabling support, we have already established that geography is less important because councillors and officers part of that committee setup will be seeking to understand how they can support people in their existing neighbourhoods, rather than trying to reorganise those neighbourhoods and their ways of working to fit within the committee's own boundaries.

This highlights the way in which this way of operation can account for the inherent "messiness" that we have already described. Lines on a map will never fully reflect that messiness; boundaries will never be perfect, and so the focus should be on an approach which:

- Takes advantage of scale and the opportunities that scale brings to bring connections and to make best use of resources.
- Is sufficiently local to allow a proper, reasoned understanding of place, and to offer support within that place in a way that is locally relevant and needed.

If future councils adopt this model it wlll be down to them, alongside the communities they serve, to define an appropriate geography that meets both of these needs.

Any approach will need to broadly reflect ward boundaries for the new authorities which may end up being different following the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's first electoral review for the area. New councils would therefore need to expect that they would review the geography of their area committees soon after setting them up.

Possible geographies

- **Current district boundaries (6 area committees):** already well understood and provides new councils with the opportunity for creative opportunities around the aggregation and disaggregation of services associated to local government reorganisation. But maintaining these boundaries in a formal way could be seen as working against the need for new councils to adopt a whole council approach to working – and the districts as they currently stand may still be too big to allow for the more granular approach that we set out here. (A slightly different approach to this might still be undertaken usefully in Oxford, which we describe in Appendix A).

- **Current county localities (9 area committees):** offers the benefit of consistency with certain other arrangements, but may need to be reviewed.
- **A more local arrangement (10+ committees):** offers a greater opportunity for a more granular understanding of local neighbourhood, communities and their needs – and provides more opportunity for better engagement with parish councils. But a large number of committees inevitably means that resource is taken up with the administration of those bodies rather than the work that they do.

Who would sit on an area committee?

We start from the principle that area committees would be established by the relevant principal authority and that they would need to be politically proportionate. The question is would this be political balance:

- Reflective of the balance *across the whole authority's area*, or;
- Reflective of the balance *within the geographical area in question* (which would be our assumption).

Irrespective of the above it would go without saying that councillors would only be nominated to sit on the area committee relevant to their specific ward.

If area committees are committees of the Council their membership would count as part of the authority's wider political balance arrangements, which might affect membership numbers. There is a way around this if full Council takes a *nem con* vote to disapply political balance arrangements for specific committees – but this would not necessarily apply for an Oxford-wide committee based on the city's charter trustee arrangements[43].

Number of councillor members

If there were – for the sake of argument – 9 area committees across Oxfordshire and, under a future governance model, 100 councillors, then each area committee would probably cover either 3 or 4 wards of a new authority with between 9 and 12 members each – if all councillors for the area in question are on the committee (and if, therefore, it is agreed that these committees do not need to be politically proportionate across the whole council area).

Number of other members

Non-voting co-option would provide the most effective and efficient way of engaging non-council members; we think that this would be best effected through the involvement of parish councillors. We think that a way would need to be found to ensure that a representative spread of parish councillors were represented – recognising that each area

[43] See Part 4

committee might cover an area across 20 or 30 parishes.

Depending on need and local interest others could be co-opted onto committees. However, we are conscious that for non-elected individuals, there would be question marks about legitimacy that might be justification for membership to be restricted to elected councillors only.

If these committees *were* to hold decision-making powers, membership would need to be organised differently because there would be a need for voting on matters of consequence.

3E: Other potential models

The framework, and models, set out above are just one example of how a range of design options can be brought together in a coherent manner – but there are a wide range of building blocks available.

Here are some ideas to provide an illustration of the different directions that designers might wish to explore. These should be considered in light of the government's views about local area committees and establishing new towns and parish councils. All of the below possibilities could be designed into a system which conforms with the design principles we laid out in section 3A. They are not mutually exclusive, and some of these ideas could be taken forward complementary our proposals on area committees. These arrangements would all have different levels of resource implication.

Hybrid Area Committees - Reinvent former district-based democratic forums as Area Committees chaired by unitary councillors, with local budgets and advisory powers. These can bridge gaps between strategic and local levels and serve as scaffolding for community-led governance.

Local Boards - Boards aligned with district boundaries that bring together councillors, officers, and community representatives to shape local plans, direct budgets, and lead place-shaping work. These provide a meaningful, accountable layer of local leadership inside a unitary system.

Codify localism in the constitution - Embed co-decision mandates into the constitution of a new unitary — requiring key local service and planning decisions to be made *with* locality structures. This protects local accountability and avoids re-centralisation.

Reframe the role of place in governance - Embed the recognition that local identity isn't just about geography but about lived experience, shared assets, and patterns of everyday life — like market towns with rural hinterlands or commuter belts with multi-use town centres. Governance should reflect and reinforce these place identities.

Charter renewal and codification - Strengthen the existing Oxfordshire Town & Parish Charter into a framework that sets out shared standards, expectations, and commitments

around co-production, devolved responsibility, and scrutiny.

Neighbourhood forums and panels - Use participatory mechanisms such as Citizens' Assemblies to tackle complex issues. Create citizen-led local panels in every area — not just as consultative bodies but as standing forums for shaping service design, local priorities, and oversight.

Municipal assemblies for Oxford City - Introduce standing, citizen-led assemblies in Oxford to recognise the city's distinct identity and complex neighbourhoods. These would reflect the city's demographic and community diversity and create a platform for place-based co-governance.

Co-operative/Sortition based Councils - In new or reformed town/parish councils, explore cooperative membership models — giving residents, local businesses, and civil society equal say. This creates shared ownership and better reflects the range of local actors involved in neighbourhood life. One way to achieve this is to use a sortition process for selection. Based on a sampling framework which matches the local demographics, this can enable a better reflection of people in a local area.

Community Commissioners - In areas of disadvantage or historic under-representation, transparently appoint individuals to act as policy brokers and community catalysts — sitting between the council and neighbourhoods to surface issues, build confidence, and help distribute decision-making power fairly. Oxfordshire has already moved to adopt a similar approach through the appointment of "Community Catalysts" through the Oxfordshire Way initiative.

"Councillor as Convenor" - Further develop councillors' focus from casework or committee oversight to local facilitation and leadership — acting as convenors of networks, co-producers of local services, and brokers of partnership. Support them with locality teams and democratic infrastructure.

Parish clusters - Address capacity gaps by enabling small parishes to join in federated arrangements. These can pool resources, share clerks, or run joint services — without losing local identity or accountability.

Participatory Budgeting - Open up a portion of the council's budget to participatory decision-making — through locality assemblies, online voting, or theme-based forums (e.g. youth services, climate action). This creates visible pathways from voice to impact.

Digital micro-governance platforms - Build civic tech infrastructure where residents can propose, vote on, and track hyper-local projects (subject to necessary thinking about the risks of digital exclusion). This would allow people to engage flexibly and meaningfully in shaping services — without always needing to attend meetings.

Community wealth building zones - Pilot locality-led public service ecosystems focused on inclusive economic development — with anchor institutions, devolved commissioning, and local procurement rooted in community priorities.

4. Exploring the approach for Oxford

There is an appetite for the establishment of a new citywide parish/town council in Oxford, or for similar action that would "fill in the map" of the current unparished area.

As we have noted, Government, however, has more recently become more equivocal about the establishment of new parishes with precepting powers. It has stated that its preference is to see the use by new principal committees of neighbourhood committees to secure engagement with local people. This option is discussed in more detail below.

A new parish or parishes would need to be a solution that arises from a community governance review (CGR). This process (which needs to be run by a relevant principal council) is usually seen as bureaucratic – but could be enhanced with a process that involves a greater degree of co-production and co-design with local people. We explore this when talking about future governance for Oxford city.

Implications of reorganisation for the city

The reorganisation of local government across Oxfordshire to create a single unitary council, or two unitaries, would mean that Oxford would no longer have its own distinct form of municipal governance.

In commissioning us, the county council specifically asked us to consider which city-wide options for governance might be viable. In doing so, we should stress that – as with the rest of this paper – our reflections should be seen as the beginning of an ongoing conversation that needs to centre the needs and aspiration of the people of the city and their elected representatives.

This part of the paper explores this by looking at two issues:

- Which aspects of neighbourhood governance – design, decision-making, delivery – might usefully be carried out city-wide in Oxford?
- Which structures might be established, and maintained, in order to do this?

4A: City-wide functions in Oxford

Our wider work has identified a spectrum of services and issues that can be managed at the most local level and we think that this holds for the city as well – with some amendment. We think that there is a case for a form of city-wide governance that engages with decision-making on the following issues in particular. Again, these would be seen through the prism of neighbourhood planning:

- Management of community assets / community facilities

- Management of parks and green spaces
- Community development and the management of cultural activities
- Business and economic development, and tourism
- Licensing and planning decision-making (although the legality and remit of these tasks would need to be subject to review – see below)
- (Social housing) estate management, where appropriate

Neighbourhood planning for the city

Oxford City Council is a planning authority and benefits from its own local development framework. On council reorganisation, local policies will be saved, but in the long term we think it likely that there will continue to be an appetite for supplementary plans, under a new council's Local Development Framework, that speak to Oxford unique position and needs.

A city-wide supplementary planning document (SPD) is likely to be one component of this. A city-wide approach would therefore be necessary to "hold" any neighbourhood planning, or consultation, activity connected to the adoption of such a document.

4B: Structures available to carry out the work

A new city-wide council

Some interviewees spoke positively about the prospect of a new city-wide council. This would either cover the currently unparished parts of the city area, or could involve the abolition of existing parish councils (further to a community governance review) and the creation of a new fully city-wide council.

This would need to be delivered by way of a community governance review either carried out by Oxford City Council as currently constituted in advance of local government reorganisation, or by a successor council subsequently. If carried out subsequently, charter trustee arrangements (see below) would be needed in the interim.

Depending on the boundaries a new council for the city area would take on the city's Royal Charter and civic plate, and would have responsibility for certain other ceremonial matters.

Although attractive we think that policymakers would need to think carefully about the viability of a new city-wide parish council for Oxford. It would – depending on boundaries – be by some distance the most populous parish council in England. Government's messaging around its willingness to accept new precepting councils might make a new council of this nature difficult to agree, given its size and profile.

That having been said, this would be the main way to preserve an independent model of municipal governance for the city – and if policymakers and others consider that to be of

overriding importance, it may be worth the argument.

Filling out and federating the parish map

One option that stops short of the creation of a new, very large, council would be the establishment of several smaller ones to cover localities of the city – supplementing those parishes that are already present. This would mean that the city of Oxford would be "fully parished" – but with those parishes each being of a similar size to (say) two or three existing Oxford City Council wards.

These parishes, formally grouped, would be able to co-ordinate their work and ensure that, together, they are able to manage and deliver services on behalf of the whole city; probably alongside an area committee of the principal authority. Representatives of parish councils could come together alongside the area committee, or could sit on it, to influence and support city-wide decision-making.

This would be a novel model for England. The downside of this approach remains Government's unwillingness to establish new parishes; and the logistical challenge associated with establishing several new parish level authorities and then making arrangements to design and embed a "federated" model for their operation.

A possible approach: a model linked to charter trustees

If it is not proposed to establish a new city-wide body to replace the current district-level city council, then one of the first matters to be considered will be the establishment of charter trustees.

City and borough status is conferred by Royal Charter. Oxford's Royal Charter dates to 1605. Where reorganisation in other places has resulted in the abolition of "city" or "borough" councils it has been necessary to establish committees of charter trustees in order to ensure a continuity of ownership of these charter arrangements.

The charter trustees would be those councillors representing wards, on the new authority, whose geographic area corresponds with the boundaries of the city as they currently exist.

This means that charter trustees would cover all parished and unparished parts of the City of Oxford.

The charter trustees would elect a Lord Mayor for Oxford on an annual basis (so this civic tradition would continue); the charter trustees would "hold" civic plate and other ceremonial material.

An approach which might be more effective and which would eliminate the need to create wholly new institutions would be to provide the committee of charter trustees with the remit of an area committee.

This, too, is a novel model, and the legality of such an approach would need to be assured. But if legally possible it would provide a way of marrying a required, ongoing set of civic functions with the practical activities set out elsewhere in this report.

Appendices

Appendix A: Methodology

The methodology combined desk research and a series of structured conversations to understand how neighbourhood governance is working in Oxfordshire today, and how it might be strengthened in future. The aim was to gather a wide range of views on what currently supports or hinders local working, what people value about it, and what changes could make it more effective and sustainable.

We invited people to take part in one-to-one interviews or small group discussions, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. These conversations explored participants' lived experience and perspectives across four core themes: identity and sense of place; local power, leadership and accountability; community engagement and participation; and the practicalities and support needed to make neighbourhood governance work well.

A segmentation framework was used to ensure a mix of perspectives across Oxfordshire's diverse geography and roles. The findings were then triangulated with research into national and international models, helping to generate a set of insights, provocations and options that are grounded in Oxfordshire's context but informed by wider learning. The outputs are not intended as a blueprint, but as a resource to support local deliberation, design and decision-making.

Interviews

We spoke with **52 individuals** from **eleven organisations** during July 2025, through a combination of sixteen interviews and five focus groups.

Participants were primarily elected members and officers from across Oxfordshire's local government community, alongside representatives from key organisations with a stake in the future governance of the county.

The conversations were semi-structured, with participants receiving a short topic guide in advance to outline the broad areas we aimed to explore. Questions were tailored to each participant or group, reflecting our stakeholder-led approach and the diverse roles and contexts represented.

All participants took part on the understanding that their contributions would remain anonymous, and that no individuals would be identified in the final report. This aligns with CfGS's standard practice for qualitative research of this nature. Findings were triangulated across multiple conversations, ensuring that no single interview or viewpoint was used in isolation to justify conclusions.

Desk research

We undertook a high-level review of documentary evidence to support two key aims:

- To build a clearer understanding of Oxfordshire as a place (summarised in the appendices);
- To identify a range of options for future locality governance, drawing on good practice from across the UK and internationally.

Sources included material produced by principal authorities, voluntary and community sector bodies, town and parish councils, and other relevant local organisations. The review was conducted in two phases: an initial scan to understand the local governance landscape, and a second round later in the process to follow up on themes and references raised during interviews. One key reference point was the **Oxfordshire Councils Charter**, which outlines shared commitments to strengthen local partnership working and support a vibrant local democracy.

Appendix B: Oxfordshire as a place

History

Modern local government in Oxfordshire dates back to the nineteenth century, although forms of local governance for and within the county date back much longer – the city of Oxford, in particular, benefits from a history of nearly a millennium of municipal government.

For most of the county area, however, the formalisation of local government began with the Municipal Corporations Act 1835. This saw existing municipal corporations being reformed into municipal boroughs. In what is now Oxfordshire, four corporations were affected – Abingdon, Banbury, Oxford and Wallingford.

Over the subsequent decades existing poor law unions became conjoined with urban and rural sanitary districts which themselves, in due course, became elected urban and rural district councils, following the model elsewhere in England. Oxfordshire County Council was itself established in 1889, action that involved the shifting of the county's boundaries.

Although the history of governance in Oxfordshire is a long one, the area currently covered by the current county of Oxfordshire has only followed its present boundaries for a comparatively short period. Following the boundary shifts of 1889, further major changes occurred in 1974, when the reorganisation instigated by the Local Government Act 1972 brought into Oxfordshire areas currently covered by the Vale of the White Horse and South Oxfordshire that had previously been in Berkshire.

The current shape of the area: the place

Although there is no such thing as a "typical county area", Oxfordshire is particularly distinctive. The presence of two major universities, as well as major manufacturing, makes the city of Oxford a more significant economic "node" than many other county seats – accentuated by the conurbation's important to the wider regional objectives relating to the OxCam Arc.

Oxfordshire is, of course, about much more than Oxford. Community identity is mixed – as is usual in areas with a mix of urban and rural geography people are more likely to identify with the town or village within which (or near which) they live than they are with "Oxfordshire" as a place.

The pursuit of growth – and the management of the tensions and pressures that come with it – has been a feature of development in the county for many years. Oxford's green belt has long constrained significant (housing) development within the city. Housing growth has instead focused on nearby towns, many of which grew significantly in the latter years of the 20th century. Bicester, Wantage (and Grove) and Didcot in particular are now experiencing further rounds of major urban extension. As we go on to discuss, opposition to these changes to the urban and rural fabric often centre on concerns over infrastructure and resources, in particular the lack of community facilities for large, new developments constructed in recent years. This raises questions about the strength of civic fabric that we discuss in more detail in the next section.

These pressures, amongst others, galvanise opposition when particularly major, highly visible, developments are proposed. The prospect of the construction of a reservoir near Abingdon has once again, as it did in the 1990s, led to a well-organised grassroots campaign of opposition. The plans for building a solar farm west of Botley have resulted in a similar community reaction. It is not unusual that communities are catalysed into coming together in response to an external threat like this, but in Oxfordshire an awareness of these challenges (and the need to be able to contribute meaningfully to discourse about the benefits, drawbacks and trade-offs of growth) is keenly felt by elected and non-elected policymakers.

Limits to growth: the current partnership perspective

Enterprise Oxfordshire (previously OxLEP, the Oxfordshire Local Economic Partnership) published in late 2023 a Strategic Economic Plan. This plan described the Oxfordshire economy in the following broad terms:

- The innovation ecosystem – assets in STEM in associated areas – is particularly strong, with strong investment from both the private and public sectors – contributing to a strong "virtuous circle" of growth. Spinouts from the University of Oxford have contributed positively to this;
- This has led to substantial pressures – including a substantial shortfall in lab space, which is being partially addressed through major developments including

at Oxford North and Milton Park. Other pressures relate to the presence of labour and skills;

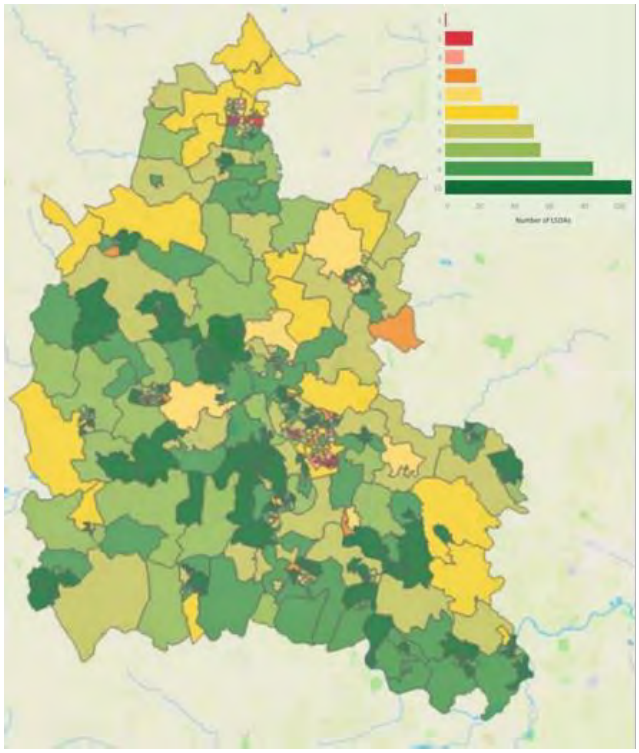
- Investment in STEM seems to be effecting wider economic transformation in Oxfordshire;
- Oxfordshire's "foundational" economy – economic activity relating to local demand (health, education, local services) employs 60% of those in employment in the area but faces challenging, around low pay, housing costs and challenges associated with labour shortages post-Brexit. EO argue that these connected challenges are widely understood amongst partners.

The presence of Oxford's two universities has a significant impact on the economic profile of the whole county. Harwell and Milton Park, both important economic nodes in their own right, at least in part owe their presence to the halo effect of Oxford's position as a centre of research. This, in turn, has had a significant effect on the demographics of neighbouring towns and villages.

Connectivity is a challenge across the county – despite the drive for growth and the presence of significant, and growing, economic activity. Oxfordshire is home to some of England's largest non-railway towns, and this (along with variable road transport connectivity) contributes to an environment in which the sense of place can be seen to focus on towns and their immediate hinterland.

The current shape of the area: the people

Understanding the demographics of Oxfordshire is important because it helps to get a sense of the capacity, and resilience, of the population to participate in the forms of neighbourhood governance that we described in the introduction.



Deprivation in Oxfordshire (Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, OCC 2022). Red is most deprived.

Oxfordshire has a rural population that is ageing. Housing affordability, as noted above, presents a significant challenge in attractive and retaining younger people. This creates challenges around community resilience.

Another challenge is the presence of transient populations. In Oxford itself, these populations are dominated by students, leading to a significant, ongoing ebb and flow which makes assessments of community need more difficult.

This is not as simple as to say that Oxford's demography is typified by a division between "town and gown", because Oxford (as we have already noted) is not a typical "university town" – it has its own centres of economic geography wholly distinct from that of its universities (not least Plant Oxford at Cowley). This itself has a significant impact on the demographics of the city and its surrounding areas. Beyond the city, visible affluence in some towns and villages sits alongside, and sometimes hides, significant deprivation (see below).

Oxfordshire is a multi-ethnic place; particularly its urban areas. Governance, consultation and involvement mechanisms are not always organised in such a way as to take account of this mix. Some interviewees told us that most public service professionals, and elected representatives, are white and that this may hinder people's ability to understand the need to design and deliver services with the needs of people from a wide range of backgrounds in mind.

Oxfordshire County Council

Equalities Impact Assessment

‘One Oxfordshire’ LGR proposal’

22/10/2025

Section 1 Summary details

Proposal Assessed: 'One Oxfordshire' Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposal to replace Oxfordshire's existing two-tier councils with a single countywide unitary council. This EIA examines the proposal's potential impacts on equalities.

Summary of Assessment: 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 countywide. If implemented, One Oxfordshire could advance equality of opportunity by eliminating the current fragmentation of services; it is expected to benefit all communities including those with protected characteristics (for example, through more cohesive planning of social care, housing and other support).

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) have been 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 focuses on objective impacts against the Equality Act criteria, ensuring a neutral, balanced analysis.

Conclusion (Section 1):

1. One Oxfordshire is assessed as a neutral-to-positive proposal in equalities terms. It neither biases nor unfairly disadvantages any protected group. In fact, it offers opportunities to address existing inequalities (for example, by applying a countywide strategy to tackle deprivation and improve access in underserved areas).
2. 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.

Completed by: Jamie Kavanagh
Authorised by:
Date of Assessment: 22/10/2025

Section 2 Detail of Proposal

2.1 Context / Background

Oxfordshire currently operates a two-tier local government system: 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:

- **Financial Pressures –** 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 unitary councils is a preferred solution to improve financial resilience and reduce costs.
- **Fragmentation of Services –** The two-tier structure 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 highways, while districts handle housing and planning), leading to duplication, siloed decision-making, and complexity for residents, as well as hindering strategic action on cross-cutting issues (for example, aligning housing development with social care or public health). The current system can also result in uneven service experiences in different parts of the county.
- **National Policy Direction –** In December 2024, the government invited all remaining two-tier areas across England to submit an interim proposal(s) for a new unitary authority or authorities. 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 unitary council.

Given the above, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) has put forward the 'One Oxfordshire' proposal to create a modern council structure that is simpler, financially resilient, and better able to meet residents' needs. This is seen not just as a structural change, but as an opportunity to improve outcomes for residents.

The context for One Oxfordshire is also influenced by devolution discussions (as part of a future Thames Valley mayoral strategic authority). A single county unitary is presented as the best platform for local service integration and for engaging with regional devolution.

2.2 Proposal

One Oxfordshire entails establishing a single 'Oxfordshire Council' unitary authority for the whole county, replacing the county and district councils. In practical terms, this means all local government services would be delivered by the single countywide council instead of six separate councils. The new council would be governed by one elected body of councillors and a single leadership team.

Rationale / Why this option - 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:

- **Streamlined, 'One-Stop' Services.** Residents and businesses will have one point of contact ('one front door') for all local government services. This simplifies access, removes confusion over which council is responsible for delivering services, and provides clear accountability for service delivery.
- **Avoiding Service Disruption.** One Oxfordshire maintains countywide 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 disaggregation.
- **Financial Efficiency and Resilience.** A single council is projected to make a £63 million annual saving, with total net savings of £163 million achieved by year five. These figures have been independently verified by PwC. The new council would have a much larger tax base and budget, improving resilience to financial shocks and allowing strategic investment. One Oxfordshire is estimated to be the fastest and least costly option to implement. Savings can be reinvested in frontline services and initiatives to address inequalities, benefiting all communities.
- **Stronger Strategic Capacity.** A single 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. It also creates a single strong voice to work with partners (including the NHS, police, universities, and neighbouring counties) and to advocate for the county's interests. This can unlock opportunities like devolution and investment.
- **Neighbourhood Empowerment.** The single unitary model is designed to empower local communities by establishing 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). Essentially, residents would still have local democratic forums (area committees, parish engagement) but backed by the resources and coherence of a countywide unitary authority. Maintaining local identity and sense of 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.

In summary, the proposal is to create a single unitary that delivers 'stronger, simpler services that are closer to communities, connected and cost effective', with the capacity to tackle countywide challenges like inequality, housing and climate change in a coordinated way.

2.3 Evidence / Intelligence Supporting the Proposal

The formulation of One Oxfordshire has been supported by a range of evidence:

- **Independent Research and Reviews.** The financial case is based on independent modelling by PwC and analysis by Pixel Financial Management.

Likewise, projections for service demand (e.g. in social care) were informed by external experts such as Newton Europe. The proposal references lessons from counties which recently became unitaries, such as Buckinghamshire and Dorset, assessing what worked well there and what pitfalls to avoid.

- **Engagement and Consultation.** Extensive stakeholder engagement underpins the case. Over Summer 2025, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) ran a countywide engagement programme with residents and stakeholders:
    - A statistically representative residents' survey (with ~1,200 respondents) covering all parts of Oxfordshire.
    - An open public survey (1,300+ responses) and on-street interviews gathering wider public opinion.
    - Deliberative research: focus groups (9 groups with 63 residents) and youth sounding boards (81 young people) to get qualitative insights.
    - Targeted sessions with stakeholders, e.g. town and parish councils (318 local councils were invited), voluntary sector, business groups, MPs, and public service partners.

Feedback from these channels indicated residents' and stakeholders' 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 and there will be strong local governance. This helped shaped the proposal, confirming the importance of the 'one front door' approach to services, and the need for robust measures for localism (such as area committees) to address concerns about local voices.

- **Data on Needs and Inequalities.** 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 ageing 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 resources. It also notes pockets of deprivation and health inequalities even in a relatively affluent county. These findings support the argument that a single council could deploy countywide initiatives (like the Marmot programme on health inequalities) more effectively than multiple councils. Local service performance data also indicates that the county council has very low unit costs and strong outcomes in adult social care and children's services). The risk to these services would be lowest with a single unitary.
- **Consultation with Other Councils.** Data and perspectives have been shared between councils, and regular meetings between chief executives and leaders have taken place during the proposal development.

2.4 Alternatives Considered / Rejected

During development of the proposal, OCC considered three main options against the government's criteria for reform:

1. One council for all of Oxfordshire.
2. Two councils (eastern/western Oxfordshire, northern/southern Oxfordshire and Oxford plus the surrounding county).

3. Three councils (Oxford and two rural authorities).

- **Option 2 (Two councils)** This option was rejected because it scored lower on key criteria. Neither new council would meet the preferred population size (both would be well under 500k), which raises concerns about resilience and viability. Financially, while some savings would be made, they would be reduced by the costs of disaggregating county services, which also brings risk. The creation of two smaller tax bases could result in differences in need (services) and resources (funding), which would likely create undue advantage or disadvantage across the county. For these reasons, a two-council model was not pursued further.

- **Option 3 (Three councils)** This option was rejected as it scored lower on key criteria. Three smaller unitaries would be significantly below the population for new councils required by government (approximately 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. Financially, this option provides the lowest savings, which would be mostly offset by the costs of disaggregation. For these reasons, a three-council model was not pursued further.

- **'Do nothing' (status quo)** This was not listed as an option in the submission as it does not meet government requirements for local government reorganisation.

Why One Oxfordshire was chosen over the alternatives.

One Oxfordshire (Option 1) was found to:

- Meet government requirements in terms of population size.
- Offer the highest financial benefit, with a swift payback.
- Avoid breaking up crucial countywide services (adult social care, children's services, fire), avoiding the attendant risks of Options 2 and 3.
- Provide a coherent geography matching Oxfordshire's functional economic area and identity.
- Be simplest to implement, with lowest risk of service interruption during the changeover.

The chosen proposal includes measures to mitigate the potential downsides of large unitaries (such as area committees to strength local governance) so that the benefits of scale are combined with the strengths of local focus. This balanced approach is at the heart of One Oxfordshire. Its anticipated impacts, especially on different community groups, are detailed in the next section.

Section 3 Impact Assessment: Protected Characteristics

The following assessment considers potential impacts (positive, negative, or neutral) of the One Oxfordshire proposal on each of the nine protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010: Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage & Civil Partnership, Pregnancy & Maternity, Race, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Religion or Belief. It also identifies any actions or mitigations required to address negative impacts.

This analysis draws on Oxfordshire-specific data (e.g. Census 2021, JSNA) and knowledge of how services might change under the new council. All impacts are assessed in light of the proposal's scope - a structural reorganisation - noting that many equality effects will depend on how the new council operates in practice (implementation phase).

For each characteristic, we indicate whether the impact is positive, negative or neutral and explain the reasoning.

3.1 Protected Characteristic: Age

Impact: Neutral to Positive

Description of Impact:

1. The age profile in Oxfordshire is diverse: the county has both an ageing 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, maintaining one countywide adults' service prevents the major risk of fragmentation that could occur under multiple smaller councils (which could lead to uneven care standards). A single 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).

2. There is a potential concern that a larger council might feel more distant for some elderly residents, especially in rural areas. However, mitigations are built into the proposal: the new council plans area committees 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 support nearby. The council's digital services will be made user-friendly for those who prefer online access. By bringing together information and resources, it may become easier for older people 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.

3. For younger people and children, the impact is likewise neutral or slightly positive. Children's social care and youth services (currently county run) would continue seamlessly, avoiding any break-up of teams that support vulnerable children. Education services (school place planning, SEN support) remain unified, potentially benefiting from closer links to housing and community services now under the same council. A single council can align early years support, public health and family services across the county to further the council's Marmot Place goal of giving every child the best start in life.

In summary, there is no aspect of the proposal that would treat people negatively due to age. Service delivery will continue to be needs-based, while the council's strategic focus on prevention (as described in the case for change) could help both ends of the age spectrum, e.g. projects to reduce isolation among the elderly and better opportunities for young people countywide.

Mitigations

1. Invest in community initiatives such as family hubs to tackle child and family poverty, and create more inclusive spaces that are child and dementia-friendly.
2. Work closely with the voluntary and community sector to ensure that services are delivered as close as possible to communities, helping build social connection and identify risks early.
3. For rural areas, area committees will be established to give local representatives (including those advocating for older residents) a forum to influence decisions.
4. The new council may wish to consider the possibility of 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).
5. The county council has an age-friendly initiative through its public health and communities' strategies (e.g. 'community hubs' for multi-generational activities), which the new council could expand.

In summary, by carefully managing the changeover and investing savings into frontline 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.

Action Owner: Programme Transition Lead & Adult Services Director
Timescale: throughout transition 2025–2028, with post-vesting day review of any reported access issues from elderly or youth groups.

3.2 Protected Characteristic: Disability

Impact: Neutral to Positive

Description of Impact:

1. Around 99,000 people in Oxfordshire have a disability (per Census 2021, including physical, mental and sensory disabilities).
2. 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) from a district council, and use district-run leisure facilities with concession schemes.
3. Under the One Oxfordshire proposal, 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.
4. The new council will continue the county's commitments to accessibility and inclusion. Oxfordshire County Council has been working on improving digital accessibility, building access, and rolling out tools for people with disabilities (for example, the 'Inclusive Service Delivery' strategy under the Including Everyone framework).
5. 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 transition to a single unitary 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.
6. The new council should give careful consideration to community-based support networks so that people do not lose local support (currently, some districts fund local disability charities or run accessible recreation programmes). The new council could look at how such support should be targeted so that all parts of Oxfordshire have equitable access.

Mitigations

1. It is recommended that the implementation should involve disability advocacy groups in the 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).
2. OCC already has an accessible website and carries out Equality Impact Assessments for major changes; this culture will continue in the new council. The EIA finds no inherent negative impact on disabled people. However, to

solidify positive outcomes it is recommended that the new council could streamline assessment processes (for instance, explore a single assessment that covers social care needs and housing needs together).

3. 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.

In summary, 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.

Action Owner: Adult Social Care & Community Services Leads
Timeline: design phase 2025-27 to ensure all customer pathways are accessible, review post-2028.

3.3 Protected Characteristic: Gender Reassignment

Impact: Neutral

Description of Impact

1. 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 national average), and Oxford City is known to have one of the largest trans and non-binary populations outside London.
2. 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.
3. 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).
4. With One Oxfordshire, there will be one Equality & 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.

Mitigations

1. Given a neutral impact, it is recommended that the main mitigation should be to continue engagement and inclusive practices. The council should ensure its public consultation and communication recognises trans and non-binary voices (for example, 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.

2. It is recommended that the existing LGBTQ+ employee network at OCC should be expanded to all employees of the new council, which helps maintain an internal culture of inclusion that translates into better service for the community.

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.

Action Owner: EDI Lead
Timeline: ongoing.

3.4 Protected Characteristic: Marriage & Civil Partnership

Impact: Neutral

Description of Impact

1. Marriage and civil partnership status does not receive differential service. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

Mitigations

1. 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.
2. Council policies (for example, employee benefits for spouses/partners) will carry over and likely be standardised at the best level across the new organisation.

Action Owner: No further action required.
Timeline: Monitored as part of general service continuity.

3.5 Protected Characteristic: Pregnancy & Maternity

Impact: Neutral

Description of Impact

1. Services touching on pregnancy and new parents include maternity healthcare (NHS-led), but also council services like antenatal classes in children's centres, health visiting (commissioned by public health), family support and housing for expectant mothers. These will not be negatively impacted by the structural change.
2. 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.
3. 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 council already has initiatives for early help (through Children & Family Centres), which will continue.
4. No adverse impact is foreseen on maternity leave or related employment rights within the council; employees who are pregnant or on maternity leave will transfer to the new council with protected terms (TUPE legislations apply). For service users, free childcare entitlements, maternity disability adaptations etc are governed by national policy and remain unaffected.

Mitigations

1. 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 straightforward communications task.
2. The council's public health function, which includes maternal health improvement programmes, will remain intact and likely get a stronger platform in one authority.
3. It is recommended that maternity voices are included in planning for the transition, e.g. invite local mother and baby groups or parent forums to provide feedback to catch any unforeseen hiccups (like if a particular baby group was district-run, making sure it continues).

In summary, there appear to be no negative impacts, so no major mitigation is required beyond maintaining service levels.

Action Owner: N/A
Timeline: to be reviewed by Children's Services post-reorganisation.

3.6 Protected Characteristic: Race (including ethnicity and national origin)

Impact: Neutral to Slight Positive

Description of Impact

1. 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 (not White-British). Oxford City is ~47% non-White-British, whereas some rural districts are over 90% White-British. 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.
2. 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.
3. One Oxfordshire could help standardise best practice countywide. For example, if one district has particularly effective outreach to Gypsy, Roma & Traveller communities, the new council can adopt that approach across the board. As a single employer, the council can strengthen diversity in its workforce.
4. OCC's Including Everyone framework highlights that the council is working toward Race Equality Code accreditation. This commitment will extend to the single unitary, potentially improving how services are delivered to minority ethnic residents (through cultural awareness, language support, etc.).
5. 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 single unitary council can address these more strategically, e.g. targeting deprived multi-ethnic neighbourhoods with coordinated interventions (housing, education and public health).
6. The proposal explicitly mentions tackling deep inequalities across the county. The Marmot Place programme and Local Policy Lab are tools the new council will use to reduce inequalities in health and increase opportunity for ethnic minorities. This suggests a positive intent.
7. There is a risk worth noting: if there were a lack of trust or engagement from minority communities due to changes in governance (for example, the new council might need to rebuild relationships that district community workers had), it must be managed carefully.
8. The EIA does not foresee this as a systemic issue, but it is important that the new council visibly continues support for initiatives like Oxford's Inclusive Communities work so that those communities feel equally valued under the new structure.

Mitigations

1. It is recommended that the new council continues targeted engagement with ethnic minority communities, for example by maintaining advisory groups or

forums (like Oxford City's migrant communities forum or similar initiatives) at the county level. 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.

2. Monitoring service uptake by ethnicity after the reorganisation will be important to ensure that previously underserved groups are not slipping through cracks.
3. In employment and service design, applying an anti-racism lens (the county council has committed to be an anti-racist organisation) will help guard against bias. There is no evidence the reorganisation would cause bias, but maintaining training and accountability (e.g. continue unconscious bias training for staff, embedding Equality Impact Assessments in all new policies) will mitigate any subtle negative trends.

In summary, the impact on racial groups is expected to be neutral or even positive through improved equity strategies.

Action Owner: EDI Lead, Engagement Team
Timeline: during transition communications and ongoing in new council's EDI strategy

3.7 Protected Characteristic: Sex

Impact: Neutral

Description of Impact

1. 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).
2. 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 the county council handles support while the districts handle housing for survivors) could be unified for a more cohesive response.
3. 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.
4. It is important to note that no job losses or service cuts should be made 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 programmes), that could be negative. However, nothing of that sort is in the proposal; services are expected to continue and potentially improve through efficiencies.

5. Combining councils will reduce the overall number of councillors. Currently, across six councils there is a certain gender makeup; in the new single council, the representation could change.

Mitigations

1. Ensure continuity and strengthening of gender-specific programmes: e.g. a commitment to being a White Ribbon authority or supporting initiatives for men (such as men's mental health projects, father's parenting groups, etc.).
2. There is no direct negative impact to mitigate but being vigilant that service redesign post-merger does not inadvertently overlook gender differences is key. 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.
3. 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.
4. It is recommended that the new council's elections encourage diverse representation. This is more of a democratic consideration than a service impact, and the election process will be governed by the usual rules (and is outside the scope of this EIA).

In summary, with these considerations in place, we foresee a neutral impact on sex.

Action Owner: N/A
Timeline: N/A

3.8 Protected Characteristic: Sexual Orientation

Impact: Neutral

Description of Impact

1. 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.
2. As with gender reassignment, the impact here is more about ensuring continued inclusion. The new council can champion county-wide LGBTQ+ inclusion (for instance, supporting Pride events in Oxford and more widely across the county).
3. A unified council may 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.

Mitigations

1. Maintain visible support for LGBTQ+ communities as a single council to signal continuity. For example, 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.
2. Externally, the council should continue diversity training so that frontline staff provide inclusive service to all residents.

In summary, there is no direct adverse impact to mitigate beyond these ongoing good practices. The new council should adopt existing equality policies from the county council and district councils that protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Action Owner: EDI Lead/ HR/ Policy
Timeline: by vesting day when policies merge.

3.9 Protected Characteristic: Religion or Belief

Impact: Neutral

Description of Impact

1. Oxfordshire residents have various faiths, 47% Christian, ~3% Muslim, ~1% Hindu, 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).
2. There are no policies in the proposal that touch on religious practices (e.g. planning permission for places of worship will follow the same planning rules, just under one planning authority). The only minor consideration is that currently some district councils have civic traditions tied to certain religious dates (like a civic service); the new council will establish its own civic traditions but this has a negligible impact on the public.

Mitigations

1. Ensure the new council continues interfaith engagement. OCC has, for 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.

In summary, no negative impact is identified so mitigation is simply ongoing inclusion.

Action Owner: EDI Lead
Timeline: Ongoing

3.10 Summary: Protected Characteristics

None of the protected characteristics are identified as facing unfair negative impact from the One Oxfordshire proposal. The majority are neutral impacts, with potential positives for some (Age, Disability, Race) due to improved service integration and equity focus.

Mitigations centre on maintaining continuity and inclusion during the transition. The Public Sector Equality Duty will continue to be met by the new council's policies and practices, and this assessment will be reviewed as the implementation proceeds to address any new issues that arise.

Below is a tabulated summary of impacts by characteristic, indicating whether we anticipate **Positive (+), Negative (–), or No Impact (0)** and key points:

Protected Characteristic	Impact	Impact Summary
Age (Older people, Young people)	+ / 0	Generally positive or neutral. Preserves countywide adult & children's services (no fragmentation), benefiting older residents and families. Unified planning across ages (e.g. 'best start in life' and Marmot goals). Mitigation: ensure local access for rural elderly.
Disability	+ / 0	Likely positive or neutral. One council provides seamless support (social care, adaptations under one roof) for ~99k disabled residents. Avoids disrupting SEN, adult care services. New council will uphold accessibility standards (Including Everyone commitments).
Gender Reassignment (Trans / Non-binary)	0	Neutral. No change in service or recognition for trans and non-binary residents. New council will maintain inclusive practices and policies; no adverse impact identified. Will continue current support to this community (e.g. LGBTQ+ inclusive training).
Marriage & Civil Partnership	0	Neutral. Registration of marriages/civil partnerships continues as currently (county function). No impact on married/civil-partnered status in service delivery.
Pregnancy & Maternity	0	Neutral. Maternity/parental services (health visiting, children's centres) remain unified and may improve through integrated family support. No reduction in support for pregnant women or new parents. Employees' maternity rights are protected.
Race (Ethnicity)	+ / 0	Neutral or slightly positive. One Oxfordshire enables a consistent approach to all ethnic groups across the county. Can better tackle racial inequalities with single strategy. No negative bias identified. Language/translation needs will be met uniformly.
Sex	0	Neutral. Services delivered equally to people as before. No differential impact, e.g. both male and female service users benefit from continuity. Possibly improved coordination in areas like domestic abuse support (benefiting women) and health initiatives for men. No adverse issues identified.
Sexual Orientation (LGB)	0	Neutral. The reorganisation does not affect residents based on orientation. The new council will continue to support

		LGBTQ+ inclusion (events, networks, anti-discrimination policies). No service impacts specific to orientation.
Religion or Belief	0	Neutral. The single council will serve all faith communities without bias. Engagement with all faith and religious groups will continue. No change in how specific religious needs (e.g. burial services, if relevant) are handled other than simplifying any cross-district issues.

(Key: '+' Positive impact, '–' Negative impact, '0' No significant impact. See narrative above for detailed analysis and mitigation actions.)

Section 4 Impact Assessment: Additional Community Impacts

Beyond the nine protected characteristics, Oxfordshire County Council also considers impacts on certain other categories as part of its inclusive approach set out in its EDI Framework, Including Everyone 2025-2029. These include **Rural Communities, the Armed Forces community, Carers, and Areas of Deprivation** (socio-economic disadvantage). Each is addressed below.

4.1 Additional Impact: Rural Communities

Impact: Neutral to Positive

Context

Oxfordshire is the most rural county in Southeast England; about 40% of residents live in small towns, villages and hamlets. Rural areas have specific challenges: distances from services, limited public transport, and an older population profile (higher proportion of 85+ residents in villages). Currently, rural services are split among councils but the county council provides the majority of key services (roads, buses, social care) while districts handle things like waste collection and local planning.

Description of Impact

1. One Oxfordshire will not change the presence of services in rural areas, for example, libraries in market towns. It may indeed 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 districts.
2. 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 communities' through area committees and closer working with town and 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.

3. 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. Given OCC already covers the whole rural area for many services, continuity is assured for those services. District-level rural programmes (like specific rural grants or community bus services) would be absorbed into the unitary, and it will be important that these are not lost. However, the amalgamation of budgets could potentially allow more streamlined support for rural initiatives by eliminating duplication.

Mitigations

1. 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. It is recommended the new council retains locality-based officers (community liaison) who understand rural community needs; this is an approach OCC already uses in some services.
2. Continue to provide local service delivery points, such as local libraries and rural tip sites. The data shows rural areas have poorer physical access to services (85 small areas in Oxfordshire are in the worst 10% nationally for access to key services by distance); a single council can target these through innovative solutions, such as mobile services and digital offers.
3. Effective communication will also mitigate concerns, such as informing rural residents how to contact the new council. Emphasising that local councillors will represent divisions that are often rural in nature, and that parishes remain intact, will help reassure continuity of local democratic input.

In summary, 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).

Action Owner: Policy & Partnerships Team
Timeline: within first year of new council

4.2 Additional Impact: Armed Forces Community

Impact: Neutral

Context

Oxfordshire has a significant Armed Forces presence, including around 10,000 serving military personnel stationed in the county and an estimated 23,500 veterans residing in the county. Military families (approximately 3,000 service children in local schools) form a distinct community with specific needs under the Armed Forces Covenant.

Description of Impact

1. 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, while OCC coordinates countywide support). Under a single council, this support can be unified, which may simplify things for service members and families.
2. There should be no break in services for the armed forces community. For instance, currently a veteran might approach a district housing authority for social housing and OCC for adult care; with one council, those processes will join up.
3. The distinct nature of military life (frequent moves, schooling needs, healthcare, etc.) means the new council must remain sensitive to the armed forces community. As OCC already covers education admissions (important for forces children) and healthcare liaison, continuity is strong.

Overall, we do not anticipate any negative impact. The covenant rights of the Armed Forces community will continue (e.g. priority in school admissions, housing allocations where applicable), but under a single set of policies.

Mitigations

1. The new council should continue the Armed Forces Covenant partnership work, ensuring representation from military base commanders in community engagement structures.
2. A practical action is to re-issue the covenant under the new council's name promptly to show commitment has not changed. Specialist staff roles, such as an Armed Forces Liaison Officer, should be maintained to help service families navigate council services. By keeping these in place, forces personnel and families should experience seamless support.

In summary, the impact is neutral: no loss of service or additional barriers. The cohesive approach could even be beneficial by having a single set of consistent policies.

Action Owner: Policy & Partnerships Team
Timeline: within first year of new council

4.3 Additional Impact: Carers

Impact: Neutral to Positive

Context

Carers include unpaid carers who look after relatives or friends due to illness, disability, etc. Oxfordshire has approximately 52,000 unpaid carers (as of 2021 Census) and notably a slightly higher prevalence of young carers than national average. Carers often rely on support services from the council (respite care, information, carers' assessments).

Description of Impact

1. 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; there is no structural change in roles. It may even simplify things: currently a carer might interact with the county council for a Carer's Assessment and with a district for 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.
2. Potential positives include unified data that might help identify and support 'hidden' carers across the county. Also, a single council could pool budgets to enhance respite services or carers' breaks. If any districts had local carer support grants, those could be merged with the county's carers support budget to create a larger, countywide programme (ensuring equitable access for carers in all areas).

Mitigations

1. 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 be managed by the new council. It will be important to communicate to carers that all contact points remain (e.g. the Carers Helpline number stays active).
2. 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. Since carers are by nature often stretched thin, the council must avoid any confusion for them during transition; clear communication can help mitigate any anxiety among the carer community.

In summary, One Oxfordshire is expected to treat carers the same or better, with the possibility of more integrated support.

Action Owner: Adult Social Care, Carers Lead
Timeline: at point of transition communications.

4.4 Additional Impact: Areas of Deprivation (Socio-economic disadvantage)

Impact: Positive (slight)

Context

Oxfordshire is an affluent county overall, but it contains pockets of significant deprivation, e.g. parts of Oxford City, Banbury and Didcot rank in the bottom 10% nationally for multiple deprivation. Nearly 20,000 children and 12,000 older people in Oxfordshire live in poverty. These communities often have complex needs and benefit from targeted programmes.

Description of Impact

1. The One Oxfordshire proposal explicitly aims to tackle inequalities across the county. By having one council, resources can be directed efficiently to deprived areas. A single council can take a countywide view and ensure that the most deprived wards (wherever they are) get priority in investment.
2. The proposal references tackling inequalities by building on and progressing existing work led by the county council's public health team, as well as utilising partnerships and new alliances. 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.
3. One council can simplify customer service for those facing hardship. For instance, currently a resident in poverty might have to apply to a district for housing benefit/council tax support and to the county for a welfare assistance grant; a single council could have a one-stop application for financial support.
4. There is no negative impact foreseen on deprived areas; services in deprived areas (such as community centres, advice centres, etc.) will continue and develop. However, one risk might be if a deprived area feels that losing its district council means losing its 'champion'. Mitigation through area committees can ensure local advocacy remains.

Mitigations

1. The new council should develop a targeted plan for deprived communities, building on existing district regeneration plans. The advantage is that these plans can be combined with transport or education projects in that area for a bigger impact. Ensuring community involvement in shaping interventions will mitigate any disengagement.
2. Continuing to monitor socio-economic data (as OCC does currently via the JSNA and insight reports) will help the new council direct funding appropriately. The proposal mentions leveraging the Local Policy Lab initiative to address inequalities; this will provide evidence-led actions for deprived areas. The council's adoption of the socio-economic duty (through the Including Everyone framework) means it will consider poorer groups in decisions. All this indicates a systemic positive approach.

In summary, no mitigations are needed because the overall impact is positive. The key will be for the new council to maintain the focus.

Action Owner: Public Health & Communities
Timeline: ongoing, with review of indices post-implementation to gauge progress.

Section 5 Impact Assessment: Additional Wider Impacts

This section evaluates broader implications of the One Oxfordshire proposal beyond protected groups and communities. It covers potential impacts on employees of the councils, other council services, external service providers and contractors, and social value (economic, social, environmental benefits under the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012). Each is assessed impartially, noting positive opportunities and any negative risks, with measures to mitigate the latter or enhance the former.

5.1 Wider Impact: Employees (All impacted employees)

Impact: Mixed (Positive and Negative)

Description of Impact

1. Under the proposal, savings will be achieved through a reduction in senior leadership roles and the removal of duplicated front office, back office and service delivery roles.
2. Approximately 8,000–10,000 employees (those currently employed by the county and five districts) will come together as a single workforce. This will be through the TUPE process, which will mean a change of employer that can be unsettling for some employees. It may potentially have a negative impact on morale and may raise feelings of anxiety around job security.
3. A single council will help create better and clearer progression pathways and create a roadmap for shaping a unified and inclusive culture. Consolidated learning budgets, policies, systems and processes will enable all employees to do their jobs well, thereby supporting equal opportunities and job satisfaction for everyone. This is therefore a positive impact.

Mitigations

1. A People and Culture workstream will help shape the new organisation. A robust engagement strategy will ensure employees and relevant trade unions are fully informed, consulted with, and supported throughout the transition, with safe spaces provided for colleagues to ask questions and raise their concerns
2. Employees across all six councils will be engaged and empowered to help shape the new council's values and culture, ensuring alignment with its vision and identity. Regular opportunities for input, including from senior leadership, will support a positive transition.
3. Robust transition plans will be put in place across all services to make employees feel welcomed to the new organisation, ensuring any existing reasonable adjustments and flexible working arrangements are in place from day 1.
4. Consistent and regular monitoring of equalities will be critical to ensuring that transition to vesting day and beyond will be as equitable and fair as possible.

In summary, the impact on employees is being managed through a careful HR strategy to maximise the positive aspects (broader opportunities, unified purpose) and mitigate

anxiety and uncertainty. With these measures, the aim is the new council has an engaged and motivated workforce that feels supported and well-informed. Continued monitoring of employee satisfaction and turnover during the transition (via employee surveys, engagement forums etc.) will be crucial to ensure any emerging issues are addressed promptly and efficiently.

Action Owner: HR working with Unitary Implementation Lead
Timescale: ongoing from decision through 2028, with regular pulse surveys and union meetings to monitor workforce well-being.

5.2 Wider Impact: Other Council Services

Impact: Positive

Description of Impact

One of the main benefits of a single unitary council is to improve council services by eliminating fragmentation, so the net impact on services is intended to be positive. 'Other council services' here refers to the operation and delivery of all functions (beyond those affecting specific community groups already covered above).

The proposal has been designed to avoid disrupting any service at point of transition and then to enhance service delivery through integration. Therefore no negative impacts are expected if the transition is managed well; indeed the proposal cites this option as being 'the least risky' for maintaining service standards. However, there are some risks to manage during implementation (e.g. potential temporary dips in performance while systems merge).

1. One Oxfordshire brings services together that are currently split between the county and districts. This is expected to improve strategic coordination and remove the 'silo effect' that can impede service effectiveness. It should also enable more innovative and streamlined service models.
2. The implementation plan includes service-specific workstreams to ensure each service 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.

Mitigations

Ensuring that the impact on services stays positive requires meticulous planning and continuous oversight.

- For each service area, a continuity plan will be drawn up. This means identifying key tasks, deadlines, and responsible personnel during the transition. A 'safe and legal day 1' audit will be performed to verify all statutory services are fully staffed and legally compliant as the new entity begins.
- The transition programme includes a legal and procurement review of contracts across all councils. The expectation is that all third party contracts will be novated across to the new council in the first instance, which would provide an extra layer of reassurance that there would be no disruption to services on day 1.

- As part of transition planning, a prioritised opportunity list of projects will be identified based on benefit to residents and commercial benefit allowing the new council to transform services and secure the benefits of a single unitary while prioritising the service experience for residents.
- Clear public communication will help mitigate any confusion over the transition to the new council. This includes updating signage, websites, emails, etc. on a coordinated schedule so that residents always find the help they need.

Action Owner: TBC
Timescale: detailed continuity plans by late 2027, with first year of new council (2028-29) monitored as a transition period.

5.3 Wider Impact: Providers

Impact: Neutral to Slight Positive

Description of Impact

1. Currently, some providers have contracts with the county council, others with district councils, some with both. 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.
2. Over time, the positive impacts for providers could include larger unified contracts, which increase scale and efficiency; larger grant funds for VCS organisations rather than multiple small pots, increasing funding stability; and greater regulatory consistency as processes will be clearer and uniform.
3. Potential negative impacts could include smaller local providers being edged out by big firms if the council moves to large consolidated contracts.

Mitigations

1. The council will proactively engage contractors, suppliers and commissioned partners well before the transition to explain how invoicing, contract management, and contacts will change. Clear guidance will be provided so that no provider is confused about who to contact for their contract.
2. A legal-procurement team will review every contract. They will identify any that require formal novation letters or consents from the provider and ensure those are secured.
3. To mitigate the risk to small providers, the new council's procurement strategy will follow the Social Value Action Plan so that 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.

With these measures, providers should experience a smooth transition. Over the longer term, any efficiencies in contract management could potentially translate into

savings that allow the council to reinvest in services (potentially benefiting providers through expanded contracts).

Action Owner: Head of Commercial & Procurement
Timescale: communication in the year before vesting day; formal novation of contracts by Day 1; review of procurement strategy in first year to maximise local and social value.

5.4 Wider Impact: Social Value

Impact: Positive

Description of Impact

1. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 requires councils to consider improving social, economic and environmental wellbeing 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.
2. A single unitary council provides the opportunity to embed these principles across all services and contracts countywide, 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.
3. There is no identified negative aspect – if the council simply carries on existing practices, the impact would be neutral; at best, it would actively use the reorganisation to drive more ambitious social value outcomes.
4. One Oxfordshire's scale might allow innovation in delivering social value. The Commercial & Procurement Service's action plan (2025) outlines steps such as establishing local supplier frameworks and setting default social value criteria for tenders.

Mitigations

1. It is recommended the new council merges the existing county and district policies on social value into one robust policy. This policy should be approved by the new council's Cabinet early on, signalling the importance of social value in all procurement.
2. 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 and development around this – that will continue.
3. Some services (like waste collection, housing maintenance) that were previously district-led might not have embedded social value clauses historically. As those contracts come up for renewal, the new council can enhance them with social value requirements.
4. The new council should track the social value delivered. Strong monitoring will ensure the positive impacts (jobs, community benefits) materialise.

5. The council should consider reinvesting some of the savings made from reorganisation into social value projects. Prioritising some reinvestment in preventative, community-level work (aligned with being a 'Marmot Place') would boost the social outcomes of the new council.
6. Legally, for any service contract over the threshold, the council must consider social value. The new council's larger procurement will meet that threshold regularly. To mitigate any risk of non-compliance, standard procedures should be in place to document how social value is considered for each relevant contract.

Action Owner: Head of Commercial & Procurement
Timescale: New Social Value Policy adopted by Vesting Day, apply to all new procurements thereafter.

Section 6 Overall Conclusion

This Equalities Impact Assessment finds that the One Oxfordshire proposal, if implemented with the planned safeguards, is fair and aligned with the public sector equality duty. It does not inherently discriminate against any protected group or community. Most impacts are neutral, with some opportunities for positive outcomes by tackling existing inequalities more effectively. Identified risks (loss of local familiarity, transition confusion) can be mitigated through strong community engagement, maintaining local access, and clear communication, all of which are part of the proposal's implementation plan. However, the new council must remain vigilant and responsive to community feedback to ensure that no group is left behind during the transition.

With the measures described, One Oxfordshire has the potential to promote equality and address the needs of all residents - urban and rural, young and old, disadvantaged and affluent - thereby fulfilling its obligations under the Equality Act.

Section 7 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).

Review date	30/10/2026
Person responsible for review	Helen Mitchell, Programme Director – Local Government Reorganisation
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