

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet on Monday 10 November 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Brown

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Railton

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Linda Smith

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Caroline Green, Chief Executive

Mish Tullar, Transition Director

Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance, and Strategy

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer

Dr Brenda McCollum, Committee and Member Services

Also present:

Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of Scrutiny

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Turner and Arshad sent apologies.

80. Declarations of Interest

None.

81. Addresses by members of the public

None received.

82. Councillor addresses on any item for decision on the Cabinet agenda

None.

83. Reports from the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee met on 5 November 2025 at a Special Meeting to consider the Council's Local Government Reorganisation Proposal. Councillor Alex Powell presented Scrutiny Committee's discussions and consideration of the proposal and their recommendation.

- The Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Three Unitary Authorities proposal be formally endorsed and submitted as Oxford City Council's preferred model for local government reorganisation to Government.

Councillor Brown thanked Councillor Powell for the discussions from Scrutiny and welcomed the engagement that they had received on the proposals.

84. Local Government Reorganisation

The Chief Executive had submitted a report to agree a preferred option for the creation of three unitary councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire as a proposal to Government for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR); and to submit the proposal to Government by the 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.

Councillor Brown presented the report. She noted the great deal of work that Council officers had put into the report and thanked officers from across the Council for their contributions. She noted that three proposals had been included in the agenda pack for their consideration, but that they were being asked to approve the Council's preferred Local Government Reorganisation proposal. Councillor Brown emphasised the importance of this moment and the opportunity they had to reorganise local government in a way that works best for the future of the city and its residents. Councillor Brown said that they believed their preferred proposal was the best option to ensure adequate representation of all three areas and to ensure that the city continued to thrive. Councillor Brown said that the Council's preferred proposal sought to ensure adequate democratic representation for all those impacted by the reorganisation.

Caroline Green, the Chief Executive, said that the three unitary option which they were proposing would address the necessary criteria from government, including the city's delivery of high-quality services. She noted the significant work which officers and consultants had invested into the proposal under consideration. The Chief Executive said that she believed their proposal made a strong case for how they would meet the needs of their residents, their economy, and deliver the housing that the city needs. She noted that the reorganisation presented an important opportunity for them to shift the dial towards a more preventative approach to social services.

Mish Tullar, Transition Director, said that the proposal should be seen in the context of devolution. He said that their proposal gave them an opportunity to form a local authority which was place based, promoted the voice of the city, and promoted growth. He commended the work that colleagues and members had done to ensure that the proposal had received a high level of engagement from a broad range of stakeholders.

Councillor Brown thanked the Transition Director and Chief Executive for their work on the proposal and their work to engage a variegated group of stakeholders.

Councillor Linda Smith said that she welcomed the government initiative to move towards unitary councils. She said that this would help residents to know who is responsible for what and who to hold responsible for their concerns. She agreed that the three unitary proposal was the best way to go to ensure that Oxford's voice in the future authority was ensured. Councillor Smith noted the differences between Oxford and rural areas of Oxfordshire and West Berkshire and stated that their preferred proposal would ensure adequate representation for the city and its residents.

Councillor Turner said that their proposal recognised the opportunities for growth in and around Oxford. He added that their proposal's focus on housing and addressing the housing crisis set it apart from the other proposals under consideration. He thanked the Council's senior leadership team for their work on this report and thanked Councillor Brown for her work to engage this proposal with as many people as possible.

Councillor Railton agreed that this proposal was the only one which ensured that the city maintained control over its future. She added that this proposal was also the only one which would address the city's housing needs. For these reasons, she agreed that the three unitary proposal was the best option for the city and its future.

Councillor Hollingsworth thanked the officers for their work on the proposal. He said that voters want councils and councillors to be as close to them as possible. He noted that their proposal had the three smallest authorities of those under consideration. He emphasised the importance of small authorities and quoted a study which showed that large organisations are usually less efficient than smaller ones. Councillor Hollingsworth noted the differences between the city and rural areas of the county and said that this was why they needed smaller, representative authorities. He added that their proposal was the only one which would allow the city to address their housing crisis. He noted that when he had met members of the public at an engagement event in Banbury, they had expressed a view that decisions about their area should equally be made locally to them.

Councillor Brown added that the three unitary proposal was commendable, as it would allow each area and authority to address their own challenges, removed from the challenges of the city of Oxford.

Councillor Chapman agreed that small organisations were more effective and that smaller authorities inspired greater confidence in government. He noted ongoing challenges with democratic deficit and said that he worried a larger authority would further democratic deficit. He stated the particular issues facing the city, which give them a different set of issues from rural areas in the county. He said that the three unitary proposal was the best option to support the prosperity of both the city and the country and he expressed his support for this proposal.

Councillor Munkonge thanked the Chief Executive, Transition Director, Councillor Brown, and the officers for their work on the proposal. He said that this proposal would allow the city to address its distinct challenges and to deliver the needed high quality services to the people of the city.

Councillor Brown said that she was confident that their proposal was the best option to meet the Council's corporate priorities.

Cabinet thanked the Council's senior officers and Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer, for their work on the proposal.

Councillor Brown thanked all the officers who had kept business running, while this proposal was worked on. She thanked the officers and members from across different councils for working well together through this process and for maintaining collegial partnerships and relationships, even while presenting differing proposals. She agreed that this proposal was an opportunity for growth, ambition, and to focus on the particular challenges of the city. She added that this proposal would also ensure that local government worked for all of the county and would ensure that everyone was able to meet their own local challenges.

Cabinet resolved to:

1. **Note and consider** all three LGR proposals that have been developed by Oxfordshire and West Berkshire councils for the creation of unitary local government across Oxfordshire, which are presented in the appendices:
 - a. Three unitary authorities (Greater Oxford, Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway) developed by Oxford City Council
 - b. Two unitary authorities (Oxford and Shires and Ridgeway) developed by West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Berkshire Council
 - c. One unitary authority (Oxfordshire Council) developed by Oxfordshire County Council.
2. **Agree** that Oxford City Council's preferred LGR proposal is for the creation of three new unitary councils covering Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, as set out in Appendix One;
3. **Delegate authority** to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Council Leader, to make any further minor amendments to the LGR proposal before its submission to Government in accordance with its prescribed process and requirements to ensure a fully compliant proposal, provided that such amendments do not materially affect the substance of the proposal. This may include the addition of explanatory graphics and case studies, and the design layout of the proposal.

85. Dates of future meetings

Cabinet noted the dates of future meetings.

Matters Exempt from Publication

If Cabinet wishes to exclude the press and the public from the meeting during consideration of any of the items on the exempt from publication part of the agenda, it will be necessary for Cabinet to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to

Information) (England) Regulations 2012 on the grounds that their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Cabinet may maintain the exemption if and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

The meeting started at 18:00 and ended at 18:45.

Chair
2025

Date: Wednesday 19 November

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal
decision notice is issued*

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.