

Project Scope – Scrutiny review of ‘devolution plans for Oxfordshire’

Review Topic	‘Devolution plans for Oxfordshire’
Lead Member	Councillor Marie Tidball
Other Review Group Members	Councillors Van Coulter, Andrew Gant, Tom Hayes & Craig Simmons
Officer support	Scrutiny Officer support approx. 1-2 days per week for up to 4 months between August and December 2016. Additional support from the Assistant Chief Executive and other Council Officers.
Background	<p>The Government has actively offered areas in England the chance to have additional funding and devolved powers in exchange for elected mayors or streamlined governance structures. All Councils in Oxfordshire agreed a joint proposal to put to Government in February 2016 aimed at unlocking £1bn funding for infrastructure to realise the County’s growth potential. Government advised that a deal hinged on strengthening the governance arrangements.</p> <p>Following discussions with the Secretary of State at the time, Greg Clark MP, the District Councils commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake an independent study into the options for unitary government to inform their thinking. The County Council separately commissioned Grant Thornton to consider options for future models of local government across Oxfordshire. Both reports were published in the Summer. Subsequently the County Council has declared its intention to develop proposals for a unitary council covering all of Oxfordshire. This proposal is not supported by the District Leaders who support an alternative proposal for three new unitary authorities and a combined authority as the best option for any potential reorganisation.</p> <p>This work has taken place against a backdrop of considerable political uncertainty and significant changes at national level. A new Prime Minister and cabinet reshuffle followed the public referendum held on 23rd June, which resulted in a decision for the UK to leave the European Union.</p> <p>As a consequence of these national changes, officials from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) met with representatives of the city, district and county councils. Their advice made clear that the Government would only agree proposals for devolution or local government reorganisation if the parties involved came to government with an agreed approach and that will not act as referee between different proposals. They</p>

	<p>have advised that they remain open to discussion on locally supported devolution proposals that include strong, accountable governance and clear accountability.</p> <p>In the absence of agreement between the County and the Districts on a future unitary model and no government led process to resolve the matter, the District Leaders view is that the focus should now be on working collectively to deliver the savings that reports from PwC and Grant Thornton have identified are available; and potential for a revised devolution deal based on current councils and a combined authority. Such a deal is currently being considered for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.</p>
<p>Rationale</p>	<p>Devolution is one of the biggest issues facing the City Council and local government in Oxfordshire. The public would expect the development of devolution proposals to be subject to independent oversight and challenge from elected members. Due to the complexity of the issues this detailed work would need to be undertaken by a review group over a series of meetings.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Committee prioritised a review of ‘devolution proposals for Oxfordshire’ when agreeing its 2016-17 work plan.</p>
<p>Purpose of Review / Objective</p>	<p>To examine what governance structures can provide the strong, accountable governance to deliver a devolution deal while balancing cost savings and stable, high quality long-term service delivery, and the process of securing an agreement and taking the findings of the consultants’ reports forwards.</p>
<p>Methodology/ Approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite verbal or written evidence from key stakeholders on their experiences of the issues, challenges and key things that need to be delivered to address these. • Review both consultant reports and any available engagement feedback. • Review and critique the original devolution proposal. • Assess the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models (e.g. 1 Unitary Authority (UA), 2UAs, 3UAs with a combined authority (CA) and mayor, 4UAs with a CA and mayor, existing structures with a CA and mayor) through the lenses of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the original devolution proposal, ○ the Governments’ criteria, and ○ the delivery of two or three key services (e.g. spatial planning, adult social care). • Seek to reach a consensus view on one or more preferred governance models for Oxfordshire. • Consider the process of securing an agreement and how progress can be made in building a consensus and taking the consultants’ findings forward to improve outcomes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider case study examples from other areas (e.g. Cambs, Wiltshire, Berkshire). • Desk research / literature review. 		
Indicators of Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust independent scrutiny of devolution proposals. • High quality engagement with key stakeholders. • Detailed consideration of different governance models and the development of a matrix setting out their strengths and weaknesses. • Broad agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of different governance models and the identification of one or more preferred options. • Recommendations that add value to devolution proposals. • The majority of recommendations are agreed. • The production of an evidence based report. 		
Specify Witnesses/ Experts	<p>External witnesses could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeremy Long – Chairman, OxLEP • Councillor Ian Hudspeth – Leader, Oxfordshire County Council • Peter Clark – County Director, Oxfordshire County Council • Other Oxfordshire District Council Leaders • A representative of the County Council for adult social care • A representative of the Clinical Commissioning Group • PwC report author(s) • Grant Thornton report author(s) <p>City Council witnesses to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Bob Price – Leader, Oxford City Council • Peter Sloman – Chief Executive • Caroline Green – Assistant Chief Executive • Patsy Dell – Head of Planning and Regulatory Services 		
Specify Evidence Sources for Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PwC report. • Grant Thornton report. • Original devolution proposal. • Summary of PwC study and District Proposition. • Any engagement feedback. • Relevant academic / policy papers. 		
Site Visits	N/A		
Projected start date	September 2016	Draft Report Deadline	25 Nov 2016
Meeting Frequency	4 meetings in 3 months	Projected completion date	15 Dec 2016 CEB

Draft outline of meetings (to be held in private session)

Meeting one – 19 September 2016, 6pm
To consider purpose, scope and methodology of scrutiny review. <u>Invited</u> Councillor Ian Hudspeth - Leader, Oxfordshire County Council Peter Clark – County Director, Oxfordshire County Council Councillor Bob Price, Leader, Oxford City Council Peter Sloman – Chief Executive Caroline Green – Assistant Chief Executive
Meeting two – 14 October 2016, 2pm
Focus on issues and challenges around growth, infrastructure and spatial planning, including a review of the original devolution proposal. <u>Invited</u> Jeremy Long – Chairman, OxLEP Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive
Meeting three – 31 October 2016, 6pm
Focus on issues and challenges around health and adult social care. <u>Invited</u> TBC – Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group TBC – Oxfordshire County Council (Adult Social Care) PwC and Grant Thornton report authors Patsy Dell, Head of Planning and Regulatory Caroline Green – Assistant Chief Executive
Meeting four – 23 November 2016, 6pm
Wash up session to agree conclusions and recommendations. <u>Invited</u> Councillor Bob Price, Leader, Oxford City Council. Peter Sloman – Chief Executive. Caroline Green – Assistant Chief Executive.