Appendix 2 - Assessment of Proposed Governance Models for Oxfordshire

Model	Strong, accountable governance	High quality service delivery	Assessment
Two-tier status quo • Current model with county and 5 district councils. • Growth Board provides a forum for joint working on growth, infrastructure & planning.	Strengths • Councils are accountable for decisions they take that affect their area. Weaknesses • Responsibility & accountability can be confusing to the public in two-tier areas. • Elected representatives aren't accountable for all council services. • Deadlocks in strategic decision making. • Growth & progress have been constrained. • Joint working needs strengthening. • Growth Board has no mechanisms for enabling a fast and effective collaborative planning process that meets the housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Growth Board is not directly accountable to the public.	Strengths • Local and county-wide services provided at appropriate scale. • No need to disaggregate county-wide services or merge district services. Weaknesses • Lack of responsiveness to significant challenges from rising demands, reducing budgets, etc. • Related services are provided by different bodies e.g. housing/social care. • Synergies & efficiencies have not being maximised. • Need to manage multiple relationships. • Concerns about cuts to homelessness, bus subsidies & children's centres. • Structure not best placed to deliver against current & future needs of Oxfordshire.	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: No likelihood Degree of local support: Wide recognition that this model is not optimal for meeting current challenges Responsiveness to communities: High
Two-tier with mayoral combined authority (CA) • Current model with county and 5 district councils with the addition of a directly elected mayor and CA. • CA takes on devolved powers and funding for transport, infrastructure and housing delivery. • Mayor would chair CA with CA members (e.g. LEP chair & council leaders) acting as mayor's cabinet. • County Council cedes	Strengths • Builds on existing structures. • Mayor would provide a single accountable figurehead & voice for Oxfordshire & act as an ambassador nationally & internationally. • Strong & accountable county-wide strategic decision making. • Provides a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds and resources with strategic partners e.g. health. • Precedents elsewhere. • Model preferred by government. Weaknesses • Unlikely to be much public appetite for additional layers of decision makers, administration & complexity unless there are clear and significant benefits.	Strengths • Strategic, county-wide & local services provided at the appropriate scale. • No need to disaggregate county-wide services or merge district services. • Provides for collaborative county-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. Weaknesses • Does not address issues around the long term sustainability of current structures. • Related services still provided by different councils. • Synergies & efficiency savings may not be maximised. • Additional relationships to manage.	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High Degree of local support: High Responsiveness to communities: High

some transport powers to CA.	• Responsibility & accountability likely to be made more confusing than status quo. • Mayor's decisions may not be supported by representatives of all affected councils. • No precedents for combined authorities operating over a single upper-tier council area. • Adds democratic costs.		
1 Unitary Authority (UA) • One council responsible for delivering all local government services in Oxfordshire. • Could be led by a council leader or a directly elected mayor. • Enhancements to the roles of parish & town councils.	Strengths • Builds on existing county structure. • Simplifies accountability with one body responsible for delivering all local government services. • Removes scope for friction and deadlock between competing sovereign bodies. • One paid service. • Elected representatives responsible for all local government services. • Provides a single voice for Oxfordshire. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. Weaknesses • No precedent for a very large UA including a medium sized city & rural areas. • Does not recognise City and Districts as democratically distinct bodies. • Potential for a 'democratic deficit' and lack of responsiveness to local needs. • Risk to legitimacy & accountability if democratic mandate of urban areas (where need is concentrated) is diluted. • Not all areas have parish councils. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working and pooling of funds and resources with strategic partners e.g. health.	Strengths • Allows transformation of council services within a single body. • Efficiencies from economies of scale. • No need to disaggregate county-wide services. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Fewest relationships to manage. • Shared boundaries with some strategic partners. • Resilient & able to absorb unexpected pressures. Weaknesses • Centralisation of district services. • Risks remoteness from communities & a lack of responsiveness. • Services may not be tailored to different needs of urban & rural areas over a large geography. • Historical preferences of different areas may not be reflected in decision making & service delivery. • Local Plan making likely to be problematic. • Large bureaucracy may be less flexible & agile than alternatives. • Potential lack of capacity in town & parish councils to take on more responsibilities. • Disruptive period of reorganisation.	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High with a mayor, low without a mayor Degree of local support: Low Responsiveness to communities: Low
1 UA with area boards (Grant Thornton's 'Option 6').	Strengths • Simplifies accountability with one body responsible for delivering all local government services.	Strengths • Allows transformation of council services within a single body. • Efficiencies from economies of scale.	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal:

42

• One council responsible for delivering all local government services in Oxfordshire. • Could be led by a council leader or a directly elected mayor. • Powers & funding delegated to district area boards. • Enhancements to the roles of parish & town councils. .	• Removes scope for friction & deadlock between competing sovereign bodies. • One paid service. • Elected representatives accountable for all local government services. • Provides a single voice for Oxfordshire. • Could balance local & strategic decision making. • Could recognise City & Districts as democratically distinct bodies. Weaknesses • No precedent for a very large UA including a medium sized city & rural areas. • Risk that area boards become a poor imitation of the status quo. • Need to carefully design appropriate level of autonomy for area boards. • Need to design & implement new & complex governance arrangements. • Lack of precedents elsewhere for area boards. • Added complexity in decision making. • Area boards add democratic costs. • Strategic decisions may not be supported by area boards and vice versa. • Not all areas have parish councils. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working with strategic partners e.g. health.	• No need to disaggregate county-wide services. • Allows for better tailoring of services to local areas than 1UA. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Could provide for Local Plan making at district area level. • Shared boundaries with some strategic partners. • Resilient & able to absorb unexpected pressures. Weaknesses • Large bureaucracy may be less flexible & agile than alternatives. • Lack of clarity about what services would be controlled by area boards & how responsible & flexible they would be. • Potential lack of capacity in town & parish councils to take on more responsibilities.	High with a mayor, low without a mayor Degree of local support: Supported by the County Council but not the District leaders Responsiveness to communities: Low.
2 UA • Two unitary councils, one for the city on existing boundaries & a 'donut' authority covering the remainder of the county. • Services could continue to be delivered on a county-wide basis through a CA or a contracted agreement.	Strengths • Simplifies responsibility & accountability. • City has its own democratic mandate reflecting urban geography & concentration of need. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. Weaknesses • Structure creates the 9th largest single tier authority in England, but also one of the smallest. • Does not recognise Districts as democratically distinct bodies.	Strengths • Services could be tailored to urban & rural geographies. • CA or contracted agreement could negate need to disaggregate county-wide services. • Considerable scope for service transformation & efficiencies. • Fewer relationships to manage. Weaknesses • Delivery of local services over a very large & diverse geography in donut UA risks lack of	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High with a mayor, low without a mayor Degree of local support: Low Responsiveness

• Could involve greater devolution of funding & powers to town & parish councils.	• Large donut authority does not reflect diversity of district areas, diluting accountability & risking 'democratic deficit' - may require sub-structures. • Geographic, population & financial imbalance between urban & rural UAs. • Risks entrenching urban - rural divide. • Does not provide for a single point of accountability & voice for Oxfordshire without a mayor & CA. • Continued scope for friction & deadlock between sovereign authorities. • Contracted agreement dilutes accountability. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds and resources with strategic partners e.g. health without a CA.	responsiveness to local needs. • Need for agreed mechanism to equalise funding & need. • Contracted agreement would limit responsiveness of City UA. • Risk City UA may be unviable if social care services disaggregated. • Does not provide for county-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Local Plan making at across an area the size of four districts likely to be problematic. • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services and centralisation of some district services.	to communities: High for the city, lower for other areas
2UA+ • Two unitary councils, one City UA with an expanded boundary & one for the remainder of the county. • Services could continue to be delivered on a county-wide basis through a CA or contracted agreement. • Could involve greater devolution of funding & powers to town & parish councils.	Strengths • Simplifies responsibility & accountability. • Largely addresses financial and geographical imbalances of 2UA. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. • Reduced need for county-wide services to be delivered through a contracted agreements. Weaknesses • Does not build on existing structures or recognise City & Districts as democratically distinct bodies. • Complexity of resolving the boundary issue - rural areas may not want to be subsumed into a 'Greater Oxford' UA. • 'Greater Oxford' & residual 'donut' authority may lack a coherent sense of place – risk to legitimacy. • Does not provide for a single point of accountability & voice for Oxfordshire without a mayor & CA. • Does not provide a mechanism for joint working with strategic partners e.g. health.	Strengths • Considerable scope for service transformation & efficiencies. • 'Greater Oxford' UA could viably deliver social care services (although a county-wide solution may be preferable). • No need for an agreed mechanism for equalising funding & need across the two UAs. • Resolves issues around the constraints of a tight city boundary. • Fewer relationships to manage. Weaknesses • 'Greater Oxford' UA would need to tailor services to rural & urban areas. • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services & the merging / reorganisation or district services. • Does not provide for county-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Local Plan making across large areas may be problematic. • Boundaries not coterminous with partners.	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High with a mayor, low without a mayor Degree of local support: Some support among elected members Responsiveness to communities: Fairly high

44

3 UA with mayor & CA	Strengths	Strengths	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High
• Three unitary councils, one for the city, one for South & Vale, one for West & Cherwell. • CA takes on devolved powers and funding for transport, infrastructure and housing delivery. • Mayor would chair CA with CA members (e.g. LEP chair & council leaders) acting as mayor's cabinet.	• Builds on existing district structures and relationship in southern Oxfordshire. • More balanced & responsive to local needs than 1UA or 2UA. • Recognises city & districts as democratically distinct bodies. • City has its own democratic mandate reflecting urban geography & need. • Mayor would provide a single accountable figurehead & voice for Oxfordshire & act as an ambassador nationally & internationally. • Could provide for strong & accountable county-wide strategic decision making. • Simplification of responsibility & accountability. • Provides a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds & resources with strategic partners e.g. health. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. Weaknesses • Responsibility for Children's Services at CA level is technically possible but unprecedented. • Contracted agreements for delivery of county-wide services could dilute accountability, as would elevating services to a CA. • Mayor's decisions may not be supported by representatives of all affected councils.	• Allows for tailoring of services to urban & rural geographies. • District-level services provided at an appropriate scale. • Scope for transformation & efficiencies. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Elevating social care to CA level or a needs-based contracted agreement would negate need to disaggregate services. • Reduced number of relationships to manage. • Local Plan making over three manageable geographic areas. Weaknesses • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services. • Risk City UA may be unviable if social care services disaggregated - need for agreed mechanism to equalise funding & need. • Lower efficiency savings than 1UA or 2UA. • Some duplication of functions is inevitable. • City boundaries remain constrained.	Degree of local support: Supported by district leaders but not county council. Responsiveness to communities: High
4 UA with mayor & CA	Strengths	Strengths	Likelihood of delivering a substantial devolution deal: High
• Four unitary authorities covering South & Vale, Oxford City, Cherwell, West Oxfordshire. • CA takes on devolved powers and funding for transport, infrastructure and housing delivery. • Mayor would chair CA	• Builds on existing district structures and relationship in southern Oxfordshire. • More balanced & responsive to local needs than 1UA or 2UA. • Recognises City & Districts as democratically distinct bodies. • City has its own democratic mandate reflecting urban geography & need. • Mayor would provide a single accountable figurehead & voice for Oxfordshire & act as an	• Allows for tailoring of services to urban & rural geographies. • District-level services provided at an appropriate scale. • Scope for transformation & efficiencies. • County-wide planning to meet housing delivery and infrastructure challenges. • Elevating social care to CA level or a needs-based contracted agreement would negate need to disaggregate services.	Degree of local support: Low Responsiveness to communities:

45

with CA members (e.g. LEP chair & council leaders) acting as mayor's cabinet.	ambassador nationally & internationally. • Could provide for strong & accountable county-wide strategic decision making. • Simplification of responsibility & accountability. • Provides a mechanism for joint working & pooling of funds & resources with strategic partners e.g. health. • Overall reduction in cost of democracy. Weaknesses • Three small UAs would be unequal to Southern Oxfordshire. • Contracted agreements for delivery of county-wide services could dilute accountability, as would elevating services to a CA. • Mayor's decisions may not be supported by representatives of all affected councils.	• Local Plan making over four manageable geographic areas. Weaknesses • Requires disaggregation or new delivery models for county-wide services. • Risk City UA may be unviable if social care disaggregated - Need for agreed mechanism to equalise funding & need. • Need to manage multiple relationships. • Lower efficiency savings than 1, 2 or 3UA. • Most duplication of back office functions. • City boundaries remain constrained. • Small authorities less resilient to unexpected pressures.	High