APPENDICES:
OXFORDSHIRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION
Three Unitary Authorities Proposal

Empowering People, Growing Prosperity, Building Communities

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Appendix A: Development of Boundary Proposals

Our proposal is for three unitary councils covering the current Oxfordshire geography and extending to include West Berkshire. This lay-down of boundaries enables three viable unitaries, close to the people they serve, and each with a distinctive identity and profile for future generations.

1. Greater Oxford Council, based on the city and its Green Belt
2. Northern Oxfordshire Council merging West Oxfordshire and most of Cherwell
3. Ridgeway Council bringing together most of Vale of Whitehorse and South Oxfordshire with West Berkshire.
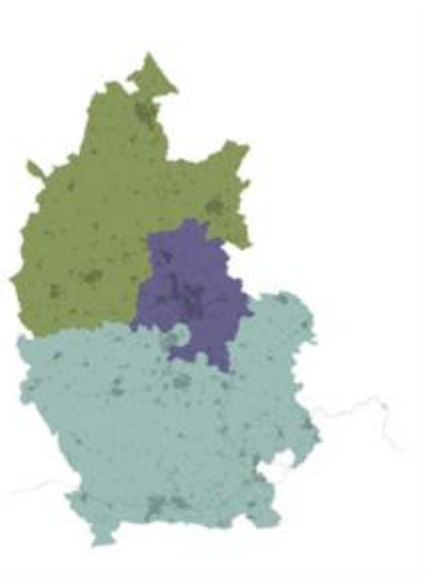
Fig A.1: Boundary proposal for a three unitary option with expanded boundaries for Greater Oxford

Early iterations of the boundary options included a self-governing city area surrounded by a single unitary authority for the rest of Oxfordshire. This option was discounted in light of the aspiration of the southern districts and West Berkshire for cross-boundary unitarisation. This significantly altered the population and financial calculations, both for a doughnut option and for a potential to create three unitary authorities.

The inclusion of West Berkshire to extend the boundaries of the overall geography fits the legislative framework as a Type C proposal: a single tier that includes adjoining areas.

Greater Oxford

Oxford has been self-governing for centuries, and the starting premise for this proposal was that the city continues to need to its own governance for its own unique circumstances. The city's international renown, its ability to attract investment and its growing innovation economy present both challenges and aspirations among its residents and businesses that are not shared by the surrounding areas.

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Oxford's young, diverse, highly qualified and very mobile population cites the lack of access to affordable housing as a key issue and identifies directly with the opportunities brought through growth. The Oxford2050 Vision – produced with the input of the city's residents and businesses - set an aspiration that "Oxford's population will continue to grow over the next thirty years as people are drawn to live, work and study in our attractive, vibrant and thriving city." A recurring theme of the vision is the desire for more affordable housing, homes near jobs, and protection for renters.

But Oxford's pro-growth outlook is not shared in many other parts of the county. An inbuilt rural majority has generally prioritised conservation over growth. For decades the democratic will of this rural majority has led to the return of councils across Oxfordshire's other districts and at the county level that have sought to minimise the amount of growth planned, or delivered.

Government has made clear that growth is its number one mission. Yet, either of the one unitary and or two unitary proposals would create an anti-growth majority electorate within any of these councils. The democratic will of those populations is likely to lock in a status quo and stymie any real dash for growth in Oxfordshire. The creation of Greater Oxford establishes an area, unique in economic potential, that is likely to see continued pro-growth majority, and support for an acceleration of housing delivery and the creation of skilled jobs

Northern Oxfordshire

The Northern unitary brings together most of Cherwell District Council with West Oxfordshire, to form a single unitary with a clear identity and priorities. This is an area with a good financial foundation and strong opportunities for future growth. There is good alignment both politically and in the priorities of residents, and good co-operation within existing partnership working on which to build. We have listened to West Oxfordshire and Cherwell concerns about their economic viability without the city, but detailed work with Pixel Financial provides us with confidence that this unitary is financially viable from day one, with strong opportunities for future growth.

Our proposals recognise the opportunities for economic and housing growth in these areas, with the economies of Bicester and Banbury demonstrating strong growth, and significant plans for new housing including at Heyford Park. Oxford's economic agglomeration will see the city's economy grow faster and further than other proposals forecast, creating further opportunities in both the supply chain and the foundational economy. Our modelling demonstrates that concerns about economic viability, while understandable on the existing basis, can be answered by the pro-growth approaches of unitarised Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire.

Ridgeway

Early in the process of developing options, the councils of West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse opened discussions about the creation of a single Ridgeway unitary council. As a proactive move by these councils, which until the 1970s had been largely a unified area, this was included positively in our considerations.
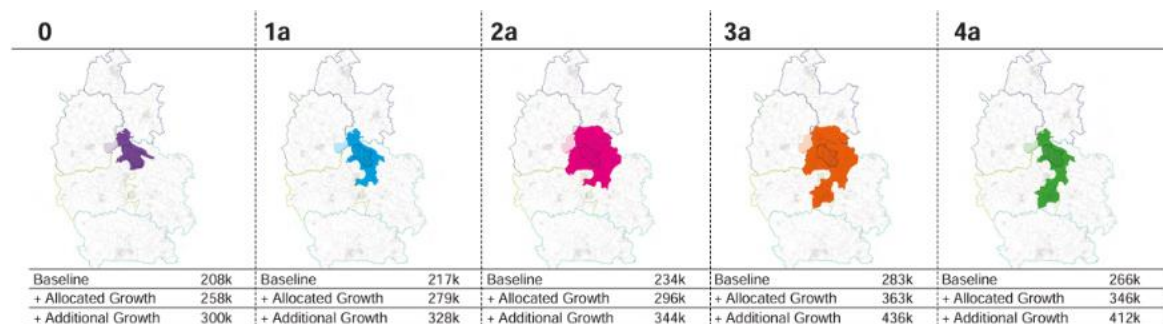
The inclusion of West Berkshire in the total geography gives a current-day population of approximately 0.9million, providing a base for three financially viable authorities. Although West Berkshire has previously sought Exceptional Financial Support, its inclusion with South Oxfordshire and Vale of the Whitehorse in a Ridgeway Council mitigates the risk of future financial failure.

The creation of Ridgeway reflects a historic sense of place for the population of the area, and as a largely rural area with similar demographics across the piece there are shared issues and opportunities for service delivery and future growth. The incorporation of an existing unitary with associated services and structures reduces the disaggregation challenges of creating three unitary councils, further mitigated by our proposal for shared services in areas where scale is important, such as NHS commissioning and Public Health provision.

Boundary development process

In the early stages there were a number of options for the division of Oxfordshire that retained a self-governing city region. The remainder of the county could be retained as a single 'doughnut' unitary, with a separate Greater Oxford at its heart, or the area could be divided into two smaller unitary authorities. The proactive work between West Berkshire, Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire to open discussions to join as a single unitary created an opportunity for to explore the viability of a three-way split. On this basis, we commissioned 5th Studio, specialists in urban design, infrastructure, landscape and architecture, to develop a number of approaches to designing suitable boundaries that enable a self-governing city-based unitary alongside other unitary arrangements for the rest of the geography.

Early mapping highlighted the topography and major settlements that dictate development and shapes how lives are lived. Alongside this, current and future economic and housing growth had to be considered.

	0	1a	2a	3a	4a
Baseline	208k	217k	234k	283k	266k
+ Allocated Growth	258k	279k	296k	363k	346k
+ Additional Growth	300k	328k	344k	436k	412k

Fig A.2: Samples of geographies developed by 5th Studio

In discussions with stakeholders in transport, business and science, there was a particular interest a single authority based around the knowledge spine (3a and 4a above). This would create one authority across the rapid growth areas of the local economy, creating a focus on economic development. However, from the perspective of statutory service delivery, this approach harmed the viability of services in the remaining areas, and removed important places of employment, education and care. The role of the Mayoral Strategic Assembly to deliver strategic planning,

transport, skills, and inward investment, addresses key issues of co-ordination across the wider region. Considering the government criteria on efficiencies and better services across the whole geography, alongside the powers of the new MSA, this option was discounted.

Alternative options included a city extended around the designated sites that will provide for Oxford's current unmet housing need, which created limited opportunities for the city and failed to provide for long-term strategic development. Variations of the greenbelt options including Abingdon and/or the science areas around Harwell were discounted as unbalanced for the remaining areas in terms of the identity, economy and urban centres.

The logic of the Green Belt is compelling. This area was created in the 1970s directly in relation to the city, and is well understood by residents, who understand it as the green lungs of the city. The boundary is already clearly established and can be mapped closely to existing parish boundaries. The majority of places within the greenbelt look to the city for work, leisure and services, and feel the influence of issues and decisions in the city. Importantly, this option enables agglomeration around Oxford, while also ensuring the Northern and Ridgeway councils have strong centres of innovation and growth to meet the financial viability criteria.

The three unitary boundaries were arrived at after detailed exploration of the options, including populations, economic and financial viability and a sense of place. The proposed boundaries create room for growth and drivers for prosperity for all three unitary authorities. They also facilitate strategically managed expansion of business and housing close to the city. Local cohesion and shared identities are also important. The boundaries recognise the different drivers for local decision-making, from settlement patterns to local demographics, and create places with a shared sense of identity and priorities. Mapping has also been conducted for new wards in the Greater Oxford area to ensure parity of representation in this model.
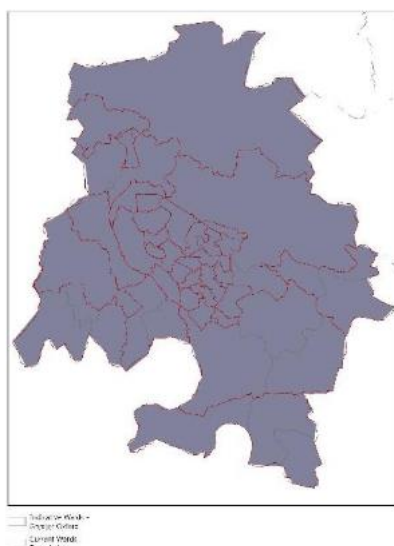
Fig A.3: Greater Oxford wards

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The proposal for a Green Belt-based boundary for Greater Oxford requires three local authority boundary changes around the city. In line with government guidance, parish councils have been used as the building blocks for these changes. Where parishes straddle the boundary, an in-out decision has been made largely on the basis of settlement patterns. Parishes that sit in the natural expansion space for Abingdon (Ridgeway) have been included in the Ridgeway geography. Eynsham is included in Northern Oxfordshire as an area with direct links to Witney (Northern Oxfordshire), and recognising that the topography would leave it untouched by Greater Oxford's strategic Green Belt release.
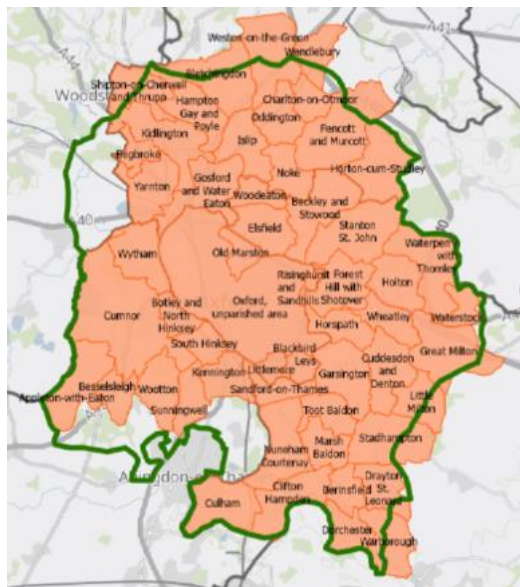
Fig A.4: Parish councils within Greater Oxford

The final proposal on boundaries has been thoroughly tested to ensure sufficient population, financial robustness, and a sense of local identity. The administrative boundaries use recognised building blocks as set out in government criteria, and where possible existing administrative boundaries have been conserved. The proposed geography has also been part of the ongoing engagement with stakeholders, including public engagement across the entire area, discussions with statutory partners covering the area, and engagement with key delivery partners. This division of the area recognises historic identities and future needs, it provides local government that is rooted in place and financially stable, and ensures every unitary can deliver homes, prosperity and quality of life for the people they serve.

Appendix B: Options Appraisal Further Detail

This appendix follows from section 3 in the main proposal and provides a more detailed rationale for our scoring of each of the LGR options against the government criteria. We set out our scoring for each option and the factors which have informed that score in the table below.

We have scored each of the options using the six government criteria which has been published and shared with all councils.

We have used a 0-3 scale. 0 represents an option which does not meet government criteria at all. 3 represents a complete match.

B.1 Single Unitary Option

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/)advantaged areas	1	This option would create a single unitary covering a diverse area of over 1,000 square miles and a total population of around 763,200. [1] This would be of a larger population size than any current single unitary authority in England other than Birmingham and Leeds, and far larger than recently created unitary authorities such as Somerset or North Yorkshire.
		While this would create a single tier of local government, it would need to cover a varied region with significant variations in priorities and geographies. For example:
		Geography – the area north of Oxfordshire is populated largely by a network of market towns and villages, with the area currently making up West Oxfordshire being one of the least densely populated in the South East of England. The areas to the south are again more rural with a strong network of market towns. Oxford is a the fifth most densely populated urban area in the South East of England which shares more in common with other UK city regions than is geographical neighbours.
		Demography – The area around Greater Oxford has a far younger population than the wider Oxfordshire, with almost a quarter of its residents being of student age and only 15% of its population aged 65 or over, while the wider county is more in line with the England average of 19%. The Greater Oxford area is more diverse than the wider county, with only 76% of residents identifying as White, compared to 87% countywide. The proportion of Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh residents in Greater Oxford area is 13%, more than double the county averages of 6%.
		Economic – While the Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine runs across the area and makes it a global centre for high tech research and industries, each area has different economic characteristics, priorities and strengths currently, as well as having distinct opportunities for the future. The North of the county has a strong base in advanced manufacturing, logistics and green technologies,

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[1] ONS 2024, https://data.oxfordshire.gov.uk/population/current-population/

alongside key tourism and retail destinations such as Blenheim Palace and Bicester Village. The South of the county is a centre for science and energy innovation, with strong life sciences, space and quantum technology companies. Oxford is home to a world-renowned university and Science Park with major global companies seeking additional sites to locate further businesses and research centres alongside the existing clusters of innovation and talent.

Housing – Each area faces its own specific challenges around housing, however these are largely caused by the demand for housing within Oxford, which drives prices and demand across the wider county. Oxford is the least affordable city in the UK, with average house prices 13.6 times the national wage, and average rents are 68% of the average wage in the city. The Greater Oxford area has the lowest levels of home ownership (56%, compared with 56% in Northern Oxfordshire and 69% in Ridgway), with higher levels of private and social renting in the city compared to the wider county.

A single unitary authority would find it hard to develop and deliver strategies which would meet the diverse priorities and demands of such a varied area. It would also struggle to address the key priority of housing demand and prices as a lack of ability to strategically release green belt land around Oxford would require building to be spread across the wider county, changing the characteristics of the smaller settlements and placing greater strains on infrastructure. A two or three unitary model would be better placed to develop and implement local strategies and plans in ways which can focus on the specific understanding of the places, economic opportunities and priorities of different areas.

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	2	A single unitary would have a council tax base of 347,536 and an estimated total annual expenditure of £906.6m.

The short-term financial benefits of economies of scale across management structures and contracts are highest for a single unitary authority. However, economies of scale alone would not sufficiently address the cost of demands in the future. Fundamental public service reform is required to develop a more preventative and responsive service which is tailored to local needs. This will better manage demand and reduce the cost of service delivery.

A single unitary is much less well placed to do this across such a large geographical area, different demographics and the different approaches required to delivering services to rural and urban areas. The size of the organisation required would also likely make the single authority less agile in its ability to deliver transformational change. The differences across Oxfordshire in terms of demographics and geographies would make a single unitary less able to develop tailored services which meet specific local needs and therefore manage demand, due to the diversity of local communities.

Additionally, a single unitary authority would consolidate all financial risks into a potential single point of failure. Should financial demands or shocks arise, which cause risks to the authority, this would have an impact across a far larger area. |

| Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens | 1 | A move to a single unitary would mean that vital statutory services such as Adults and Children's social care would face the least disruption, as they are currently provided by the existing County authority. However, LGR presents a key opportunity to reconsider and re-structure public service delivery to ensure that it is high quality and sustainable for the future. The 2023 Ofsted and CQC SEND inspection highlighted a need for a significant programme of change.

Driving real change relies on a deep understanding of local communities at a place-based level, an ability to deliver transformation of services in an agile and rapid fashion and a flexibility to tailor services and partnerships around the needs of specific areas.

The relative harder task of disaggregating services to a larger number of unitary authorities would result in services which can better respond to the priories and demands of specific localities. A single unitary would be least well placed to meet this criterion as the broad reach and size of the organisation would mean it is furthest removed from the communities and places it serves and can therefore be less able to respond to specific needs. This would result in weaker services which would be less able to address demand and mean that efficiencies at Day One are lost in longer term demand for services due to worse outcomes. |
| Councils must work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views | 1 | As outlined in earlier criteria, a single unitary council would span a very large geographical area, and a population larger than almost any other unitary authority in the country. Travel from the north to south of the county (for example from Banbury to Henley-on-Thames) takes over an hour by car and an hour 45 minutes by public transport. This relative distance make it harder for councillors and staff to travel across a single unitary, which will be necessary to build relationships and collaborate in person.

Oxfordshire contains distinct identities, and this has been reflected in engagement across the county in the development of proposals. A single unitary would dilute the wide variety of local identities across Oxfordshire and therefore the voice and varied priorities of its communities. Public engagement undertaken by the proposers of all three unitary options (3UA, 2UA and 1UA) has consistently shown that people in Oxfordshire want councils which are closely linked to their communities and worry that bigger authorities lose touch with its residents – citing that some communities already feel they feel less in touch with services currently delivered on a county-wide scale. While the rural areas of Oxfordshire contain smaller settlements and market towns which each have their own identities and priorities, there has been a consistent voice in engagement that they see themselves as distinct from the city and would not want to have their identity merged with the city authority.

A single unitary would cover the densely populated Oxford area alongside the sparsely populated West Oxfordshire. It would be required to address both the urban deprivation issues of the city alongside the issues of rural isolation which drives deprivation across much the north of the county. Across other criteria we have set out the different areas of the county – and a single unitary authority across them would not be felt by Oxfordshire residents to be able to adequately address the distinct local priorities of its diverse places. |

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	1	A new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) spanning Oxfordshire and Berkshire is being proposed. This could cover a population up to of 1.9m, dependant on the authorities which form it.[2]

A single unitary would be too close in size to the MSA and would account for at minimum 37% of its population. It would aim to take a strategic view across the whole county, which would be insufficiently distinct in remit to the strategic role of the MSA across the wider geography. A single unitary would not give sufficient ability to engage on local concerns and priorities.

This would dilute the local voices at the MSA level by far greater than that of the next largest authority in the area: Swindon (if becoming part of the authority, with 233,100 residents at 2021 census) .[3] This would also weaken the voice of the city when compared to other major metropolitan areas within this MSA area – particularly Reading, Slough and Swindon (should these form parts of the emerging authority) – which would each have their own unitary authority to represent them. |
| Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment | 1 | As covered in earlier criteria, the single unitary would cover a broad geography, large population and several communities and settlements with distinct demands and priorities. This fundamentally makes it harder to engage at a local level.

There is a risk that a single unitary would be too remote from the communities it serves to be able to engage most meaningfully.

The requirement to work across such a broad range of places and priorities would make it harder to co-design services which meet local needs and mean a greater balance would need to be struck between the distinct requirements of places. This would cause issues when needing to be flexible to work to meet the specific needs of small rural hamlets, larger market towns and a densely populated urban area. The larger scale of the authority would reduce the ability to work flexibly and closely with specific neighbourhoods to empower them to shape the services in their areas. |

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[2] 2021 Census
[3] 2021 Census

B.2 Two Unitary Option

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/)advantaged areas	2	A two unitary model, based on the proposed Oxford and the Shires and Ridgeway Councils would serve populations of 471,716 and 482,703 respectively. These are of more appropriate scale than the 1UA proposal. For this option, the existing unitary of West Berkshire would be incorporated into Ridgeway. This would cement an artificial boundary around within the Oxford conurbation, that would see residents on either side of the artificial dividing line – in some cases on adjacent streets – receiving different services. It would also see continued cross-boundary issues around development.

Broadly, the proposal of Ridgeway appears to give a suitable geography for a single authority. The proposed Ridgeway authority would serve an area of distinct market towns and smaller settlements, but is across an area with strong historical ties and a relatively consistent set of demographics and priorities. Much of Ridgeway is rural with lower-density settlements and open countrysides, although there are some larger towns such as Abingdon, Didcot and Henley which act acts commuter and economic hubs. There are strong rail links which connect the towns in the south of the area to London via Reading.

Ridgeway is the least deprived area of Oxfordshire with a relatively affluent population and shares similar overall demographic characteristics as highlighted in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025.[4] However, there are some distinct challenges within the towns of Abingdon, Didcot and Calcot where up to 16% of children live in absolute poverty, compared to around 5% across the wider area of Ridgeway. It has the highest level of people aged 65 and older across Oxfordshire – although at 20% this is only slightly higher than the national average of 19%. Ridgeway.

A proposed Ridgeway authority which retains the current boundary with Oxford City Council (which would become part of Oxford and the Shires under this proposal) would retain a tight boundary around the city. This would mean a large proportion of Oxford's current Green Belt would be within Ridgeway. Retaining this would limit the ability to release Green Belt land for housing development, given the large areas of land available across Ridgeway. This would require housebuilding to be spread across a wider area. However, broadly plans developed historically by authorities in this area have emphasised a priority to preserve the countryside and characteristics of existing settlements, which spreading housing demand would conflict with.

The proposed authority of Oxford and the Shires would create a unitary with two distinct characteristics – the urban area of Oxford and the rural or market towns of the remaining area. This would present challenges to meeting the quite distinct needs of these two contrasting places.

The geographies within this authority would be highly contrasting – containing both the second least densely populated area (current West Oxfordshire) with the fifth most densely populated urban area (Oxford) in the

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south east. This also reflects in very different needs for the areas – with the rural areas experiencing deprivation of access to services while in Oxford deprivation is more in line with those seen in other urban areas across the country.

Demographic statistics – and fresh data from the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025 - show relative consistency across the existing Cherwell and West Oxfordshire, with the city of Oxford presenting a significantly distinct population. Oxford is distinctly younger in age, driven particularly by student age population. In 2022, only 11% of Oxford's population was of state pension age, compared to 17% in Cherwell and 20.77% in West Oxfordshire.[5] Differences are also reflected in homes – with only 46.7% of residents of Oxford owning their own home, compared to 67% in Cherwell and 69% in West Oxfordshire. Similarly, there is a far higher rate of private and social renting in Oxford than seen in the rest of the authority.[6]

Oxford and the Shires would also struggle to release Green Belt land for development due to the wide availability of land across the rest of the authority. This would result in less homes being built, less ability to address the chronic housing shortage which drives demand and high house prices in Oxford and requiring more homes to be built in rural areas, impacting the countryside and changing the characteristics of settlements.

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	**2**	Oxford and the Shires and Ridgeway would have council tax bases of 156,233 and 191,302 respectively. They would also have total annual expenditure in the region of £556m for Oxford and the Shires and £561m for Ridgeway, which would put them in a strong position to withstand financial shocks.

A two authority model would be able to make substantial savings from the economies of scale by streamlining management structures, staffing and systems. However, this would not save as much as a single unitary would.

However, this should be seen within the larger context of the cost of demand for services. Savings from rationalisation will deliver in the short term, but growth in demand for services would be greater than this amount unless public service reform delivers place-based preventative work which addresses needs. While Ridgeway would be able to focus on its relatively consistent priorities, Oxford and the Shires would face challenges in needing to balance the varied and unique circumstances of their communities. Most difficult for this would be balancing Oxford's needs as a major city with the priorities and demands of the dispersed population of the current West Oxfordshire. Combining these into a single authority would be less likely to deliver the right services to address demand than a three unitary model.

The two unitary model would, however, be more agile and able to deliver public sector reform than a single unitary.

It should be noted that there is no reason why two or more unitary authorities would not be able to partner to deliver shared services and leverage economies of scale at a larger level where it would make sense to do so. |

[5] Subnational population projections for England: 2022-based, ONS
[6] Census 2021

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Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	2	A two unitary model would, while incorporating two existing two social care structures into two new authorities, would till involve some disruption to key statutory services such as Children's and Adults Social Care. Additionally, lower tier services would also undergo change through aggregating functions across districts. As set out elsewhere in the proposal, LGR should be seen as a major, generational opportunity to deliver public sector reform. This should focus on high quality, sustainable services which meet current need and can be agile to future requirements. Doing this relies on: • Deep understanding of the circumstances and needs of local communities; • An ability to deliver transformation rapidly and in an agile manner; and • The flexibility to join and tailor services to meet local needs (for example around social care, housing, health, benefits, education and employment). The two unitary model would be more able to tailor services to meet the needs of its geographies than the single unitary option. However, while it would be most able to do this in the Ridgeway area, the contrasting populations, demands and priorities of Oxford and the Shires would require a constant balance between two very distinct areas within one authority. This would impact on the quality of services, as they would be less able to be tailored to these very varied communities.
Councils must work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	2	The issues outlined elsewhere in this appraisal would be apparent here in relation to Oxford and the Shires. While the Ridgeway would be able to respond to local needs across its villages and market towns, Oxford and the Shires would need to meet the very different needs of both the city and the rural areas it contains. It would need to consider the views of the highly rural and dispersed population of West Oxfordshire alongside those of a major city (Oxford), as well as the major market towns (such as Banbury and Bicester). The two unitary proposal has been developed by district councils across Oxfordshire and the current unitary of West Berkshire. This work has developed a view of the place across Oxfordshire informed by these places, which any successful proposal should listen to. However, engagement across Oxfordshire by both the two and three unitary authorities proposals has consistently stated that there is a strong local view that councils should be close to their communities and not be so big that they lose touch with residents. Residents want to see councils based on areas relevant to their communities. As demonstrated even by name, Oxford and the Shires would clearly be trying to balance between two distinct areas and trying to respond to these views rather than able to focus on more specific local needs.

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| New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements | 2 | A new Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) spanning Oxford and Berkshire is being proposed. This could cover a population up to of 1.9m, dependant on the authorities which form it.[7]

The two unitary authority proposal would better suit the ambitions of the MSA than a single unitary for the county, by being able to focus better on specific areas and work in a more place-based way.

However, the rural areas of the north of the county and the city would only have one voice in this MSA. The Oxford and the Shires seat at the table would always have to speak for two places, with distinct demands and priorities always requiring balance. The authority would be made up of 63% voices outside Oxford and only 37% of those within Oxford – meaning that a major UK city contributing to the growth of the MSA and country would not be the majority voice within its own authority.

This would also weaken the voice of the city when compared to other major metropolitan areas within this MSA area – particularly Reading and Slough – which would each have their own authority represented. |
| Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment | 2 | As covered in earlier criteria, the Ridgeway authority would be able to engage strongly with its populations and speak for the more aligned priorities and concerns of this area which has a historically strongly connected identity. However, there would be a greater challenge in being able to co-create services across Oxford and the Shires. While any community engagement will need to respond to hyper local responses which can vary across neighbourhoods, taking in the highly different experiences and priorities of rural areas with the city of Oxford presents a significant challenge.

In engagement, the citizens of rural towns and villages across the county have been clear: the city of Oxford does not define Oxfordshire. Creating an authority which attempts to combine these communities would not be responding to this engagement. It would mean that those living in "the shires" would always feel that their priorities are always having to be considered in balance with that of Oxford, and vice versa. This would limit the feeling of true empowerment for these areas. |

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[7] 2021 Census

B.3 Three Unitary authorities Option

LGR Criteria	Score	Rationale
A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis/)advantaged areas	3	Within this proposal, a single tier of local government is achieved as three new unitary authorities are created from the current two-tier, seven authority system, a Greater Oxford, Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway. Each of the three unitary areas have ensured a sensible economic area with balanced tax bases and designed to recognise the different needs, demands, challenges and economic strengths across Greater Oxford, Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway. They all share a common ambition to build a more prosperous future for all of those in Oxfordshire. They can best achieve this by being focussed on their own particular areas. No part of Oxfordshire has a single unified identity or demographic. However, by splitting the broadly different rural and market town areas of Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway from the Greater Oxford's urban geography and the satellite villages which have close connections to the city, the three unitary authority proposal creates authorities which can best work within the context of its own place. The three unitary model will deliver on the Government's mission to increase housing supply in responding to local need and with local coordination. It will allow for the building of up to 40,000 homes over the next 15 years through release of green belt land around Oxford – significantly ahead of Government housing targets, which alternative proposals cannot match. The proposed service delivery models have been informed and developed through thorough engagement with council members, key stakeholders and wider engagement groups including businesses and residents. The financial implications of reorganisation - including costs, savings and income – have also been assessed for the three unitary model. Each area proposal sets out how the new unitary councils will have the required leadership and capacity at the optimum scale and proximity to residents to respond to the needs and challenges of each place.
Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	2	This proposal sets up three authorities: Greater Oxford with an annual revenue expenditure of £396m; Northern Oxfordshire with an annual revenue expenditure of £431m; and Ridgeway with an annual revenue expenditure of £749m. All three unitary authorities are therefore of a scale which would suitably withstand financial shocks. They are optimally sized for success: large enough to achieve economies of scale but not so large as to dilute local identity or weaken financial control. They are far from outliers in either tax base or population served and each demonstrates a scale consistent with fiscal viability and capacity. All authorities would be able to demonstrate strong core spending power supported by their tax base size and composition. The modelling suggests that payback period for this proposal is within 4 years and there are then ongoing savings of around £48.6 million per annum for the aggregated position of all 3 unitary authorities going forward. The analysis shows this three unitary proposal is the right size to achieve these

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efficiencies. These are c£14m pa lower than the 1UA or 2UA proposals in 2032/33. However, it is noted that this this modelling hasn't included the additional tax revenues that will be generated by the significant increase in both business rates and council tax in Greater Oxford due to its growth proposals.

The total population of the three unitary areas currently is 935,000. Greater Oxford has 240,000 residents, Northern Oxfordshire has 265,000 residents, and Ridgeway has 430,000 residents. Rapid housing delivery in line with Government targets will see significant population growth by 2040 to 370,000 in Northern Oxfordshire (including the delivery of 13k homes in Upper Heyford) and 545,000 in Ridgeway. Housing delivery in Greater Oxford will exceed Government targets leading to a population of 345,000 by 2040.

This proposal sets out why the areas proposed are smaller than 500,000 based on the specific and distinct geographies and demographics of each unitary, the need to represent each area distinctly as part of devolution, as well as being required for suitable levels of green belt release to maximise and support growth. It is also noted that national research has found that there is not a corelation between better outcomes and larger population size of authorities (outlined in section 4.3 of this proposal).

The three unitary proposal will deliver efficiency savings in aggregate and in the individual new unitary authorities arising from ICT, support services, managerial, democratic processes, the disposal and rationalisation of property transferred and external audit costs. Additionally, savings will be driven from transformation of early intervention, adult social case and children's services, as well was waste collection and disposal. In the three unitary authority proposal, in addition to increased council income for all new unitary authorities arising from the ability to levy the Adult Social Care Premium, significant increased income will arise from growth in dwelling numbers and new businesses. The balance sheet financial strength analysis suggests that each unitary should be able manage these transitional costs with some of the authorities, such as Oxford, already making early provision of costs in the current round of medium-term financial planning. Where possible, use will be made of the flexible use of capital receipts to support transformation projects.

Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	**3**	The proposals will ensure services are tailored to local circumstances and will be developed collaboratively with local communities and partners. The focus will be on the development of a transformative, preventative model that links growth to improved outcomes and reduced inequality. Independent assessment has shown all three unitary authorities would be able to provide sustainable services. Each unitary will be able to take a single coordinated approach to addressing priorities for their area. Decisions can focus on the needs of specific areas, and the integrated model allows for more agile service delivery.

The proposal shows how three unitary authorities will be more agile, connected to their local communities and able to work collaboratively with partners. Services will be commissioned and delivered at the most appropriate level, some across multiple authorities. For example, each |

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authority will have its own sovereign children's services, but Safeguarding Boards will operate across all three unitary authorities. Services will be explicitly designed to respond to local circumstances and improve outcomes to give residents the best quality of life with a mix of direct delivery and shared services. It will achieve this through the creation of efficiencies from consolidation while also investing in new capacity, digital capability, and innovative service models to underpin long-term viability.

The proposals align with the wider public sector reform agenda including the NHS ten-year plan, and devolution. They focus on data-led place-based and integrated early intervention and prevention, tailoring collaborative service delivery to respond to community needs effectively in each unitary area, ensuring better value for money organisationally and at a systems level.

The proposal for three unitary authorities has considered the impact of a range of crucial public services and how the new unitary authorities can deliver better public services that improve outcomes for residents, through identifying and addressing needs in a timely manner. This includes:

- Localised approach to Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and SEND – the three unitary authorities will deliver their own sovereign services with collaboration on critical areas with other unitary authorities to effectively fulfil statutory duties, maintain economies of scale and avoid unnecessary disaggregation
- Community-based early intervention and prevention model boosting community networks and resilience
- In-house statutory homelessness services rooted in prevention

Councils must work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	**3**	Collaborative work with the five other Oxfordshire councils, and West Berkshire, took place to develop proposals for reorganising local government. Collective agreement was made to a shared data protocol to ensure consistent baseline comparisons, and a series of teach-in sessions were delivered across the councils. As a proposer of a three unitary model for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, Oxford City Council's Leader, Chief Executive, and Leadership Team actively worked with the other councils, and West Berkshire, to shape the proposal.

A comprehensive and inclusive engagement programme was delivered across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire to support the proposal for Local Government Reorganisation. A diverse range of methods and strategies were carefully designed to ensure meaningful, constructive, inclusive, and representative participation throughout the process.

The proposal protects Oxfordshire's historic and cultural identity while aligning governance with natural community boundaries. It gives residents more say in local planning and ensures services are tailored to urban, rural, and market town needs. Development is directed to less sensitive areas, balancing growth with housing, heritage, and environmental protection. It strengthens local representation and delivers smarter, place-based decision-making.

Feedback indicated strong support for smaller, locally responsive councils, alongside concerns regarding transport, housing, respecting local identity, and representation. Feedback has been used to tailor approaches and respond to green space protection, urban – rural balance, financial sustainability and improving services and access.

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	**3**	This proposal for unitary structures was developed concurrently with preparation of an Expression of Interest for devolution to create a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority. It sets out how it will provide constituent authorities which provide a balance of three voices for Oxfordshire to the Mayoral Strategic Authority, representing its distinct places and suitably balancing representation of the urban and rural populations.
		The creation of three unitary authorities across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire will help ensure there is closer parity in scale among the constituent unitary authorities within a Thames Valley MSA than a single Oxfordshire unitary council which would be around 37% the population size of the MSA itself.
		This would ensure that Oxford would have a suitable voice representing this key city and growth area to the MSA. The Greater Oxford proposal ensures that 71% of the residents of this unitary would be in the city of Oxford. This is a far greater proportion than the two unitary (37%) or single unitary (22%) proposals – which would mean needing to balance competing rural and urban voices to a far greater extent. This proposal means that Greater Oxford can speak for Oxford and its immediate surroundings, and Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway can speak to their own distinct communities rather.
		Alignment of timing for vesting of the three new unitaries and the MSA in 2028 will also ensure a smooth transition for Fire & Rescue Services and associated emergency planning functions to the new strategic authority.
Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	**3**	Three unitary authorities will allow for governance that is more tailored and representative. This proposal will support local leaders better understand and tackle the unique challenges and opportunities within their areas. Explicit within this proposal are arrangements that will support increased community engagement in democratic processes, but also the design of local authority services and community empowerment more generally.
		A community place-based approach will see enhanced neighbourhood engagement and delivery models. The three unitary authorities will co-design with residents and partners neighbourhood governance arrangements to support local requirements. This will deliver decision making at the lowest effective level to speed up delivery and growth, tailored to each community's circumstance.
		Parish and Town Councils will retain their independence and functions. Where present, they will be invited to participate in NACs. Our approach supports local decision-making building on existing networks understanding the Oxford speaks clearly for the city, while towns and villages across Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway are empowered to speak for themselves.

Appendix C: Volterra Oxfordshire LGR Economic Growth Report

Please see attached separate paper

Appendix D: Engagement Detail

Local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire needs governance that meets today's challenges and tomorrow's ambitions. The Three Unitary Authorities proposal delivers modern, efficient, and community-focused governance.

A comprehensive and inclusive engagement programme was delivered across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire to support the proposal for Local Government Reorganisation. A diverse range of methods and strategies were carefully designed to ensure meaningful, constructive, inclusive, and representative participation throughout the process.

Thousands of residents, businesses, partners, and stakeholders across Oxfordshire, and West Berkshire and regionally shaped this proposal through extensive engagement.

The City Council delivered wide-ranging and inclusive engagement to understand what people across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire want from this once in a generation opportunity to reshape how local government is structured, to ensure that our proposal is responding to their priorities.

Engagement is guiding how the City Council continues to collaborate as the proposal evolves and authorities are developed in greater detail. Early and inclusive engagement has built trust and improved the quality of the proposal, reflecting a strong appetite for localised governance that meets community needs.

The Council has engaged with, amongst others:

- Residents across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire
- Dozens of Oxfordshire businesses including large strategically important employers
- Police & Crime Commissioner and Oxfordshire Police Commander
- Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Universities
- 7 Oxfordshire MPs and 4 Berkshire MPs
- Healthwatch Oxfordshire
- ICB and health trusts
- Oxfordshire voluntary and community sector stakeholders and partners
- Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils
- Oxford Civic Society
- Oxford City Council employees and their representatives, Unison and Unite.
- Our Partnerships Fast Cities (Oxford, Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Swindon, Norwich Peterborough) and Cathedral Cities (Oxford, Cambridge, Norwich, Exeter, Lincoln) Groups
- Multi-Academy Trust education partners
- Parish Councils
- Conference of Colleges (Oxford) in particular landowning colleges
- Oxford Growth Commission
- Oxford Bus Company

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- Leaders of 6 other local authorities within the proposed geography, and Leaders of 3 neighbouring councils in Berkshire and Swindon.

In addition, the Council has engaged and listened through a range of media including:

- Meetings and calls
- Workshops
- Inviting letters of support
- Online surveys
- Social media
- Round table events
- Community based venues across Oxfordshire
- Short-form videos
- Bus shelter posters
- Public events.

Three Unitary Authorities engagement programme

The engagement programme launched in June 2025 with a website, special edition newsletters, press release, short-form video, bus shelter posters and, Facebook and Instagram advertising. The goal was to raise awareness for 3 Unitary Authority proposal Oxford and drive traffic to the website.

In July 2025, the online survey and drop-in events were launched. The Council issued a press release, Facebook events, Facebook and Instagram advertising and TikTok advertising. The Council also created a series of short-form videos, with Cabinet Members inviting residents to visit drop-in events in Berinsfield, Botley, Kennington and Kidlington.

A series of short-form videos explored themes of the 3 Unitary Authority proposal: transport, housing, local identity and the economy.

Drop-in Events and Community Forums

A series of drop-in events were held across Oxfordshire in Oxford, Abingdon, Banbury, Berinsfield, Botley, Didcot, Kennington, Kidlington, Wheatley and Witney, and one in Newbury (West Berkshire).

These events provided opportunities for residents to ask questions, share concerns, and engage directly with council officers and elected members. Engagement took place with approximately 340 citizens across all eleven events.

Public responses to the proposals reflected a wide range of perspectives, highlighting both areas of support and concern across key themes.

Many respondents expressed uncertainty regarding future council tax levels, councillor representation, and election timelines. There were notable concerns about the potential loss of

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local identity, particularly in rural communities. A recurring theme was the need for greater clarity on the role of parish councils and how local voices would be incorporated under the new governance structure.

Feedback on transport and infrastructure was strong, with widespread concern about currently inadequate public transport links. Respondents called for improvements to Park & Ride services and raised issues around congestion, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), and road closures in and around Oxford. Many expressed a view that transport decisions about the city were being made by councillors representing distant parts of the county. Some felt that current infrastructure capacity may be insufficient to support the scale of proposed growth.

Views on housing expansion were mixed. While some welcomed growth and the potential for increased availability of affordable housing, others expressed concerns over the potential for overdevelopment, particularly in areas lacking adequate services. Concerns were raised about building on flood plains and contaminated land, and there was a clear desire to preserve rural character.

Some respondents questioned the alignment of the proposals with climate goals and expressed concern that a focus on science and innovation could come at the expense of community identity. There were calls for deeper grassroots engagement and reforms to welfare systems to ensure social equity.

Concerns were voiced about council tax revenues being disproportionately allocated to urban centres, and questions were raised regarding job security for existing local authority staff. However, there was also interest in opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and a strong desire for equitable service provision across districts.

Three major surveys of residents were conducted:

- The Council held an initial online Residents Panel survey in February 2025 that focused on gauging public appetite for change and understanding priorities, using its standing representative panel of Oxford citizens; 266 responses received.
- The Council held an open survey on its consultation portal about local government reorganisation between 1 July and 12 August 2025. The survey was promoted via social media, local media, and community networks across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. It explored public preferences for different governance models and gathered detailed feedback on the three-unitary proposal; over 1,580 responses were received.
- A second survey of the Oxford Residents Panel was undertaken between 23 July and 15 September which added questions on LGR to the standard annual survey of residents' satisfaction with City Council services.

D.1 Key findings from our surveys

February 2025 Oxford Residents Panel Survey

In February 2025, Oxford City Council conducted a survey on the interim proposals using its Residents' Panel. The panel is a representative sample of Oxford residents managed on the Council's behalf by independent polling company Beehive.

The survey, which had 266 responses, found:

- 82% think the current two-tier local government arrangements could be improved; 7% disagreed
- 67% think councils should not be too large, so they better meet the needs of residents; 11% disagreed
- 61% think a single council covering the greater Oxford area would best meet the needs of residents; 17% disagreed
- 37% think a single council covering the whole of Oxfordshire would best meet the needs of residents; 40% disagreed

A press release was issued on the survey results: Greater Oxford: The survey results are in

July – August 2025 Public Survey on LGR

Over 1,580 people participated in the Council's main public survey on LGR, with a strong representation from across Oxfordshire's diverse communities and West Berkshire residents.

Table 1: Survey responses by current District and percentage of total responses

	Total	Percentage
Cherwell	153	9.68%
Oxford City	611	38.67%
South Oxfordshire	236	14.94%
Vale of White Horse	294	18.61%
West Berkshire	115	7.28%
West Oxfordshire	120	7.59%
Other	51	3.23%

Key survey findings include:

- 69% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Councils are most effective when they are smaller and closer to the people they serve, enabling them to respond and adapt more easily to local needs;" 17.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Urban and rural areas often require different approaches to housing, transport, education and skills, and other key council services;" 12.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed

- 75.1% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Housing, transport, education and skills need different approaches between urban and rural areas;" 16.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- 68.% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I want to see more housing built in the right places to meet local needs (including affordability, proximity to family/friends, and access to jobs);" 16.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed

The Council also asked residents whether councils should prioritise "good quality services and responding to local need" or "cost savings." The results showed a strong preference for "good quality services and responding to local need."

A total of 914 comments were collected in response to this open-ended question, representing 58% of the 1,581 overall survey responses.

A press release was issued on the survey results: Residents prefer smaller, more responsive councils, survey finds

Annual Residents Panel Survey 2025

Two additional questions were included in the 2025 survey specifically to inform the Council's LGR submission.

- The majority of residents (62%) agree that councils are most effective when they are smaller and closer to the people they serve, enabling them to respond and adapt more easily to local needs
- An even bigger majority (72%) agree that urban and rural areas often require different approaches to housing, transport, education and skills, and other key council services
- A substantial majority of 90% agree that the council should prioritise good quality services and responding to local need.
- Whilst levels of agreement (43%) and disagreement (40%) were fairly equal on the council prioritising cost savings.

October 2025: Oxford Housing and Growth – Business Stakeholder Survey

The City Council sought the views of local businesses and employers to help inform the shape of Local Government Reorganisation that best supports future planning for housing and economic growth in and around Oxford city. Insights from this short survey contributes to ongoing work to understand how Oxford can meet its housing needs while supporting business growth and sustainable development.

35 responses were received to the City Council survey, across the Health, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, Education, University, Property, Retail and Voluntary sectors.

3. Over 80% of respondents said being located in or near Oxford is very or extremely important to their business success.
4. Around 68% strongly agree that Oxford should go beyond government's housing delivery targets.

5. Almost 85% agree that affordable housing near Oxford is important for business growth.
6. 46% favour building additional homes close to the city, including suitable locations within the Green Belt. (23% would prefer development beyond the Green Belt)
7. Over half (54%) believe future development should balance new homes with employment space.

Summary findings from the Business Stakeholder survey:

Location Importance

How important is being located within or near Oxford to the success of your business? - Please explain why being located within or near Oxford is important (or not) to your business, and any benefits or challenges you experience.

- 30 responses received.

Being located within or near Oxford is generally considered highly important for most stakeholders, with significant benefits in client proximity, community engagement, academic and professional networking, and operational efficiency.

Challenges such as congestion, cost of living, and planning complexity are acknowledged but often seen as manageable trade-offs for the strategic advantages of an Oxford location.

Housing Delivery Target

To what extent do you agree that Oxford should go beyond the government's target for delivering new homes in and around the city?

- 26 responses received.

Stakeholders generally support additional housing in and around Oxford, with a strong emphasis on affordability, accessibility, and community integration. Many highlight the need to ensure housing supports the local workforce, including essential and lower-paid employees, while avoiding sprawl or unsustainable development.

Some stakeholders also stress that housing growth must be carefully managed to protect green spaces, historic areas, and the city's character, and be accompanied by supporting infrastructure such as transport, schools, and community facilities.

Importance of Affordable Housing for Business Growth

To what extent do you agree that the supply of affordable housing near Oxford is important for business growth?
- 21 responses received.

Stakeholders consistently highlight that affordable housing is essential for attracting and retaining a full spectrum of workers, supporting local businesses, and sustaining Oxford's broader economy. Without access to reasonably priced housing, recruitment and workforce stability are significantly constrained, which can impact productivity, service delivery, and the city's research and innovation ecosystem.

Affordable housing is also seen as important for community cohesion, sustainable commuting, and supporting public services, such as schools, while helping create a diverse and vibrant city centre that sustains businesses and the wider economy.

Priorities for Housing Locations

Alongside sites within the city, where should we prioritise building the additional homes Oxford needs?

- 19 responses received.

Overall, stakeholders support a balanced approach: densifying the city, making use of brownfield and greyfield sites, carefully extending into areas with good transport links, and avoiding or minimally impacting Green Belt land and existing green spaces.

Priorities for Future Development

How should future development be prioritised?

- 17 responses received.

Stakeholders emphasise the need for a balanced, mixed-use approach that supports both housing and economic growth. While there is strong support for new homes, particularly to address affordability and workforce recruitment, many also stress the importance of preserving and providing commercial, office, and research space to sustain Oxford's economy, including the arts, leisure, and high-tech sectors.

Commercial Development and Jobs Near Oxford

What do you feel about delivering more commercial development and jobs close to the city of Oxford, in suitable locations in the Green Belt?

- 19 responses received.

Stakeholders support strategic commercial development near Oxford, particularly to support the knowledge economy and sustainable commuting, but stress that Green Belt land should generally be protected, brownfield sites prioritised, and housing provision integrated to support the workforce.

Council Size and Local Responsiveness

A majority of respondents (62%) agreed that councils are most effective when they are smaller and closer to the communities they serve. This reflects a clear preference for governance models that enable responsiveness and adaptability to local needs. Only 22% disagreed, indicating broad support for more localised decision-making. Some residents expressed reservations, potentially reflecting concerns about fragmentation, reduced economies of scale, or inconsistencies in service delivery across different areas.

Differentiated Approaches for Urban and Rural Areas

An even larger proportion (72%) agreed that urban and rural areas often require distinct approaches to housing, transport, education, skills, and other key services. This supports the strategic case for place-based policy design and delivery. A minority (12%) disagreed, suggesting some concerns about fairness or the risk of unequal service standards, particularly in areas that straddle urban-rural boundaries.

Service Quality vs. Cost Savings

When asked about service priorities, 90% of respondents expressed a strong preference for councils to prioritise good quality services and responsiveness to local need. In contrast, views on prioritising cost savings were more divided, with 43% in agreement and 40% in disagreement.

Stakeholder and Organisational Feedback

Engagement with key stakeholders provided valuable insights:

- University, Colleges and developers: Interested in the scale of growth proposed and opportunity to address Oxford's housing crisis, highlighted the need to maintain strong links across the knowledge spine and noted the context of Devolution placing responsibility for strategic transport and skills with an MSA.
- Business and Community Groups: Generally supportive of streamlined services, delivery of affordable housing, local accountability, and economic development opportunities.
- Healthwatch Oxfordshire: Emphasised the importance of safeguarding public health and social care integration, and ensuring local voice in health governance
- Parish and Town Councils: Expressed mixed views—some welcomed the opportunity for greater localism, while others sought clarity on powers and funding

Insights and Lessons Learned

The engagement process highlighted several key lessons:

- Early and inclusive engagement builds trust and improves proposals
- There is a strong appetite for localised governance that reflects community needs
- Clear communication about service delivery, cost savings, and democratic accountability is essential.
- Stakeholders value transparency and co-design in shaping future governance

Three unitary authorities engagement

Between June and August 2025, the three unitary authorities engagement programme achieved strong digital visibility and engagement across six platforms over the period. A total of 32 unique content pieces were shared across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn and X, 11 Facebook events were created to support in-person activities.

The communications targeted the messages to Oxfordshire (763,218 residents) and West Berkshire (163,367 residents). This means everyone in our region saw our social media posts on average 2.8. times. A significant proportion of the views were on TikTok, where 74% of our audience is 18 to 34 years old.

Key outcomes included:

- 2.6M+ impressions – broad reach and visibility
- 38.8K link clicks – strong interest in content
- 1,650 hours of video watched – high engagement with video formats
- 8.3K reactions, 2.7K comments, 1.5K shares – active user interaction
- 1.1K saves – content perceived as valuable by users

The communications successfully combined reach with meaningful engagement, particularly through video content and link-driven actions. These results suggest a well-targeted strategy that encouraged both awareness and interaction. Content output included:

- 32 unique content pieces shared across six platforms
- 11 Facebook events created for in-person activities
- Performance Highlights (4-month period):
- 2,613,111 impressions – total times content was displayed to users
- 8,358 likes/reactions – user engagement through likes and other reactions
- 2,771 comments – direct user responses and discussions
- 1,476 shares – content redistributed by users
- 1,100 saves – content bookmarked for later
- 38,874 link clicks – users clicking through to external content
- 1,650 hours watched – total video watch time across platforms (video content only)

TikTok and Instagram were especially effective in driving saves and shares, indicating strong audience resonance.

Key themes from verbatim feedback:
- Transport and Housing videos sparked the most discussion, with users expressing both support and concern
- Positive sentiment focused on solutions like the Cowley Branch Line to ease congestion
- Concerns included scepticism about housing developments respecting the Green Belt and fears of increased traffic
- Emerging narratives included:
    - Need genuinely affordable housing
    - Avoid additional housing leading to more congestion
    - LTNs are the core issue
    - Suggestions for tram lines and critiques of bus commuting costs.

Oxford City Council Member workshops

Four Member workshops were delivered as part of the Council's 3 Unitary Authority Local Government Reorganisation proposal. Each workshop focused on key themes, were led and facilitated by one of the Councils senior officers and were open to all Members.

- Housing delivery and economy
- Transport
- Social Services, communities and housing integration

- Governance and local representation.

The Council's core LGR team supported the workshops, and the discussions helped the Council to develop the overall proposals for a three-unitary arrangement across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

Oxfordshire Parish Council engagement

Two parish council engagement events have been held to consider each of the LGR proposals. The first organised by the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, with about 50 parish councillors attending. The second organised by Beckley Parish Council in the form of a public meeting, with many parish councils represented. Key issues raised include rural identity and concerns about villages becoming urban extensions, the scale of development, and the need for improved bus and rail services. There was a need for better engagement, increased resources and a clearer voice for parishes with new unitary councils – with a hope that they might be coopted onto proposed new Neighbourhood Committees.

Voluntary and Community Sector engagement

Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners were engaged through an LGR briefing session organised by the umbrella body Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action and through participation in focus groups organised by Oxford City Council. The engagement confirmed that smaller, place-based councils would help build local connections between residents, groups and local authorities. There was strong support for a more place-based approach highlighted strong support for community-led, locally responsive services, alongside several key concerns and opportunities for improvement.

VCS organisations included those from working in cultural, careers, social care, environmental, mental health, housing older people, children and local community groups. A summary of feedback is set out below.

Community Strengths and Assets

- Strong support for hyperlocal, community-centered, and thematic engagement, with smaller VCS partners seen as agile, responsive, and central to prevention and wellbeing.
- Existing community activity and partnerships are valued, and building on these will improve prevention, resilience, and connections across Oxfordshire.
- Neighbourhood hubs and community centres are key touchpoints, particularly where the co-location of staff has already shown positive outcomes.

Collaborative Action and Governance

- Local partnerships and subgroups (e.g., nature partnerships, community associations) demonstrate the power of collaborative working. Sustaining and expanding these is a priority.
- Clear appetite for participatory governance models such as neighbourhood budgeting and community-led decision-making.

- Strong support for the three-unitary proposal as more responsive to local needs, with a focus on long-term outcomes rather than just cost savings.

Support for Vulnerable Residents and Communities

- Rising demand for services for SEND children, young carers, and families is placing pressure on small charities, who face funding gaps and capacity strains.
- Ongoing need for sustainable support and funding models for VCS, including reforms to commissioning and contract processes with a much more engaged and local approach, connecting residents to more local and bespoke support in their communities.

Nature, Culture, and Identity

- Enthusiasm for green and blue spaces as drivers of health and wellbeing, antisocial behaviour reduction, and community cohesion, with alignment to Local Nature Recovery strategies.
- Align environmental and cultural priorities across planning - embed nature recovery, green space protection, and cultural amenities in housing and transport growth.
- Protecting Oxfordshire's cultural identity and ensuring cultural amenities and activities are distributed across new housing developments is vital to community cohesion and reducing travel pressures.
- Align environmental and cultural priorities across planning - embed nature recovery, green space protection, and cultural amenities in housing and transport growth.

Services and Accessibility

- Broad support for person-centered, locally accessible services, with blended digital and face-to-face delivery.
- Concerns about gaps in basic local facilities like GP surgeries, swimming pools, and community centres.
- Transport and connectivity, especially in rural and outlying areas, is a major concern. Better links to Oxford are needed for access to jobs, education, and healthcare. Integration with housing and support for sustainable transport is essential.

Opportunities and Next Steps

- Strengthen and scale up local VCS partnerships, especially within prevention and wellbeing work.
- Explore participatory budgeting and neighbourhood governance to increase community autonomy.
- Align transport, housing, and environmental planning to ensure growth directly benefits local communities.
- Ensure clear protections for green spaces and transparent communication of plans.

- Build capacity in the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector through revised funding processes that address gaps and better link investment to local growth.

Public Meeting on Local Government Reform – September 2025

Beckley and Stowood Parish Council hosted a public meeting in September 2025 to discuss proposals for Local Government Reform. Oxford City Council was invited to present, alongside representatives from other councils and local stakeholders.

The meeting provided an overview of the three proposed Unitary Authority models, outlining their respective implications and potential benefits for the community. Attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussion.

Presentations were delivered by:

- The Leader of Oxford City Council (Three Unitary Authorities proposal)
- The Leader of Oxfordshire County Council (Single Unitary Authority proposal)
- The Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council (Two Unitary Authorities proposal)

Approximately 90 people attended, including residents, Parish Council representatives, and local activists.

Stakeholders expressed significant interest in the implications of Local Government Reorganisation, raising a range of questions and concerns. Key themes included financial clarity and sustainability, with queries about funding arrangements and long-term financial resilience.

Governance and representation were also prominent, particularly regarding the future role and capacity of councillors, the balance between efficiency and effective representation, and the preservation of local identity. The importance of maintaining local identity and ensuring accessibility to council services - including the ability to speak to someone in person in an office-based environment - was highlighted, particularly in the context of a potentially larger, or more remote unitary authority.

Environmental issues featured strongly, with calls for robust greenbelt protection and clarity on how environmental sustainability would be prioritised amid planning and housing pressures.

Partnership working was another area of focus, with questions about integration with key partners such as Thames Valley Police, the BOB Integrated Care Board, and South-Central Ambulance Service. The need for clear communication and engagement with Parish Councils was also highlighted.

Finally, concerns were raised about whether public views, such as opposition to congestion charges, are genuinely considered in decision-making, transport and connectivity, and 'will Parish Councils really be involved and listened to'.

Stakeholder Engagement Register

Stakeholder	Sector	Format
GP Partner - Clinical Director – Oxford	Health	Meeting

Boundary Commission for England	Public administration and governance	Meeting
3 Unitary Authority - Survey	Public	Survey
Key Oxford City Stakeholders	Cross-sector strategic collaboration - Oxford	Letter
Oxford Civic Society	Civic registered charity	Meeting
Oxford Residents Panel	Public	Survey
Oxford Growth Commission	Economic development and infrastructure	Meeting

Oxford Strategic Partnership:
  • Public Sector
  • Business Sector
  • Community Sector
  • Health Sector
  • Education Sector
  • Thames Valley Police
  • Voluntary Sector
	Cross-sector strategic collaboration - Oxford	Meetings

Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils	Public administration and governance	In-person. (All Oxfordshire proposals represented)
Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action workshop - 23 VCSE organisations were represented	Third Sector	In-person. (All Oxfordshire proposals represented)
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Oxfordshire County Council	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Cherwell District Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
South Oxfordshire District Council	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Vale of White Horse District Council	Public administration and governance	Meetings
West Oxfordshire Council	Public administration and governance	Meetings
West Berkshire County Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Abingdon (Vale of White Horse District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Banbury (Cherwell District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Berinsfield (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Botley (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Didcot (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Kidlington (Cherwell District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Newbury (West Berkshire Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Oxford (Oxford City Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Wheatley (South Oxfordshire District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Witney (West Oxfordshire District Council)	Public - In the community	Drop-In Event
Beckley and Stowood Parish Council - Public & Parishes	Public - In the community	Public meeting
Oxford City Council - Corporate Policy Officers Group (internal)	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council – Employees	Public administration and governance	Meetings

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Oxford City Council & Oxford Direct Service - Employee Focus Groups	Public administration and governance	Focus Groups
Oxford City Council - Leadership Conversation	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council - Internal Officer groups	Public administration and governance	Workshops
Oxford City Council - Internal Framing Groups	Public administration and governance	Workshops
Oxford City Council - Leaders Group	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council - Group Leaders	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford City Council - Elected Member sessions - Social Services, Communities, and Housing Integration - Transport - Governance and Local Representation - Housing and Economy	Public administration and governance	Workshops
Lee Dillon MP (MP for Newbury)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Calum Miller MP (MP for Bicester and Woodstock)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Charlie Maynard MP (MP for Witney)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Freddie Van Mierlo MP (MP for Henley and Thame)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Layal Moran MP (MP for Oxford West and Abingdon)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Olly Glover MP (MP for Didcot and Wantage)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP (MP for Oxford East)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Sean Woodcock MP (MP for Banbury)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Olivia Bailey MP (MP for Reading West and Mid-Berkshire)	UK Parliament	Meeting
Matt Rodda MP (MP for Reading Central)	UK Parliament	Discussion
Yuan Yang MP (MP for Earley and Woodley)	UK Parliament	Discussion
Thames Valley Police Crime Commissioner	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Thames Valley Police Chief Superintendent	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Unison and Unite	Public Service Unions	Meeting
Healthwatch Oxfordshire	Health	Written feedback
Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board	Health	Meeting
Secondary Education	Education	Meetings
Voluntary and Community Stakeholders - 3 sessions, with representation from 13 organisations.	Third Sector	On-line Drop-In Events
Oxfordshire County Council - Service Transformation for Adult Social Care	Teach-In Session	Briefing

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Oxfordshire County Council - Service Transformation for Children's Services & SEND (Teach-In session)	Teach-In Session	Briefing
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	Teach-In Session	Briefing
Conference of Colleges - University and landowning colleges	Higher Education	Meeting
Oxford Housing & Growth - Business Stakeholders	Oxford Business Stakeholders	Survey
Oxford Business Stakeholders	Oxford Business Stakeholders	Meetings
Oxford Brookes University (Vice-Chancellor, Oxford Brookes University)	Higher Education	Meeting
Oxford Bus Company	Public Transport	Meeting
Fast Cities Group: • Cambridge City Council • Milton Keynes Council • Norwich City Council • Oxford City Council • Peterborough City Council • Swindon Borough Council	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Oxford University Health - NHS Foundation Trust	Health	Meeting
Cathedral Cities Group: • Cambridge City Council • City of Lincoln Council • Exeter City Council • Gloucester City Council • Ipswich Borough Council • Norwich City Council • Oxford City Council	Public administration and governance	Meetings
District Councils Network	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Mayoral Strategic Authority - Summits	Public administration and governance	Meetings
Reading Borough Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting
Swindon Borough Council	Public administration and governance	Meeting

Strategic Partnerships

Defined as: A long-term, mutually beneficial relationship to achieve shared strategic goals. Typically, deep, collaborative, and aligned with the core missions of partners.

Oxford Growth Commission	Oxfordshire Children's Trust Board	Oxford Strategic Partnership
Oxfordshire Joint Leaders Committee	Prevention and Health Inequalities Forum	Oxford Safer Communities
Oxfordshire Place Base Partnership	Oxford Zero Carbon Partnership	One Public Estate

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Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board	Oxfordshire Health Improvement Board	Fast Growth Cities
Homes England - Statement of Common Ground (Duty to align to meet unmet housing need)	Oxfordshire Resources & Waste Partnership	Oxford West End

Collaborative Partnerships

Defined as: A relationship between two or more stakeholders, that work together toward a shared goal or mutual benefit. Emphasising cooperation, shared resources, and joint decision-making.

University and innovation partnerships	Communities Joint Working - Oxfordshire	Homelessness Partnership
East West Main Line Partnership (Rail)	Community Champions Partnerships	Oxfordshire Skills Board
Oxford Strategic Rail Promoters Group	Community Health Partnerships	Economic Growth Steering Board
Oxfordshire Local Skills Advisory Board (CIMPSA)	Cultural Partnerships	Community Impact Zone (CIZ)
The Leys Health and Wellbeing Partnership	Interfaith Forum/Partnership	Age UK Oxford
Barton Health and Wellbeing Partnership	East Oxford Youth Partnership	Community First Oxfordshire
Wood Farm Health and Wellbeing Partnership	Leys Youth Partnership	Collaborative Housing
Rose Hill Health and Wellbeing Partnership	Children and Young People Partnership (City)	Aspire Oxford
Littlemore Health and Wellbeing Partnership	Littlemore Community Partnership	Oxford University Hospitals
Rose Hill Youth Partnership	Cultural Education Partnership	Oxford Brookes University
Countywide Food Network	Council of Sanctuary Local Authority Network	Advice Centre Forum
Adult Social Care (Oxfordshire County Council)	Oxfordshire Migration Partnership	Move South East
Children Services Oxfordshire	South East Strategic Partnership for Migration	BICEP

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Northway Community Partnership	Marmalade Partnership Group	Talk of the Town
Retail Bursar Group	Cornmarket Street landlord forum	Broad Street Protocol

Operational Partnerships

Defined as: A business relationship where partners collaborate to improve or manage day-to-day operations. Focused on efficiency, execution, and performance in specific areas of business.

District Councils Network	Getting Oxfordshire online	Digital Inclusion Network
Local Government Association	Hearing Impairment Team - Abingdon	LiFT Implementation
Local Government Information Unit	Oxford Social Prescribing Network	Over 50+ Group
Oxford City Council of Sanctuary External Stakeholders group	Donnington Medical Partnership	Redevco
Refugee Led Research Hub	Enabling Registered Providers	English National Ballet
Asylum Partnership Meeting	Local Insight Working Group	Carers Oxfordshire
Oxford Windrush Working Group	Events Marketing Group	Tourism Group
	Landsec and Oxford City Council	

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Appendix E: Council Tax and Harmonisation

E.1 Council Tax

Council tax is integral to council finances for ensuring the financial sustainability of any new unitary council. Inevitably different Councils have different levels of council tax charge which is the result of annual incremental political decisions at the different councils over many years. Through the creation of unitary councils, bringing together areas which have historically different levels of council tax charge, result in the need to harmonise those council tax charges over time.

Harmonisation must take place by day 1 of year 9 from vesting day, although if you move too quickly some residents receive a high council tax increase whereas if you go too slow residents on the same council tax bands get charged different levels of council tax for a longer period. Ultimately the levels of council tax and speed of harmonisation will be a political decision for the Shadow Authorities. For the purposes of equity between Council taxpayers, it is preferable to have the shortest period of harmonisation possible. However, this must be taken in the context of affordability and the impact on Council Taxpayers of the annual increase. It therefore may be necessary to harmonise over a longer period than one year.

An additional nuance of the proposed Unitary models in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire is that there is a difference balance of service delivery between the district council and the parish council in different areas. For instance, the average parish Council band D charge in Oxford City is £21 but in the rest of Oxfordshire the average parish Council band D charge is £114. Differences in the provision of services between different areas must be adjusted using a mechanism of special expenses which is an adjustment between areas made in the council tax setting process.

E.2 Special Expenses

Special expenses are applied when a main precepting body i.e. a district or unitary Council, provides a service in a parish (or unparished area) which is provided in other parishes by a town or parish council. To avoid double taxation the cost of this service must be met by the council taxpayers of the town or parish where the service is being provided so a special expense is charged to the council taxpayers of that parish or area. It should be noted that special expenses are not additional spending over and above the budget set by the Council but a classification within the overall budget.

Legislation (Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992) specifies the items which are to be treated as special items for the purposes of calculating the Council Tax. These items include:

A precept relating to part only of the Council's area e.g. parish precepts;
The whole of the expenses (or only some) of those incurred by the Council in performing in a part of its area a function performed elsewhere in its area by a Parish Council; and
Any net expenses which arise out of the Council's possession of property held in trust for a part of its area.

It is item 2 in that list that needs to be considered in respect of the unitary proposals. The types of costs included in this item would normally include (not exclusively):

1. Cemetery provision

2. Community Centres
3. Allotment provision
4. Parks, Open Spaces and Recreation Grounds

E.3 Council Tax Harmonisation

Current Band D levels for each existing authority are:

Table 2: Current Band Ds

Billing Authority	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £
Oxford	2,252.70
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64
West Oxfordshire	2,040.78
Vale of the White Horse	2,073.09
Cherwell	2,069.90
West Berkshire	1,921.41
Highest Band D	2,252.70
Lowest Band D	1,921.41

As already identified, harmonisation of Council Tax in the shortest period possible within affordability and financial impact considerations is desirable in order to achieve equity across the new unitary authorities with all service users in a new council paying the same rate. In doing this, Councils will likely want to ensure that they maximise income in order to deal with financial pressures facing councils in both year one and every subsequent year. The new unitary authorities will also likely want to comply with the referendum limits. The choice of methods and timeframe for harmonisation will be a decision for the new unitary authorities; these options are provided therefore for indicative purposes and the results have not been included in the overall costs and savings figures. The harmonisation analysis has been undertaken using 2025/26 council tax figures since these are a known factor; any projection to estimated 2027/28 council tax levels for analysis purposes would have the same overall results since consistent percentages would be applied to get to the estimated figures. 2025/26 council tax figures also have the benefit of being recognisable and published figures and are consistent with the use of 2025/26 budget information for baseline calculations.

There are four options for Council Tax Harmonisation that have been assessed:

1. Harmonising to the Highest Band D with a 4.99% increase
2. Harmonising to the Highest Band D without a 4.99% increase
3. Harmonising to the Lowest Band D with a 4.99% increase
4. Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D

E.3.1 Harmonising to the Highest band D with a 4.99% increase

Council tax referendum limits apply to the overall weighted average band D of an authority. Harmonising to the highest band D in each unitary area after applying the annual referendum limit

would inevitably breach the referendum limit. This can be shown in the table 3 below which shows the overall calculated yields when a 4.99% increase is applied to the highest Band D:

Table 3: Harmonising to the Highest band D with a 4.99% increase

Unitary	Tax Base	Weighted Average Band D £	Weighted Average Band D Plus 4.99% Increase £	Highest Band D	Highest Band D Plus 4.99% Increase £	Council Tax Yield from Highest Band D £	Referendum Limit £
Greater Oxford	75,436.6	2,184.88	2,293.90	2,252.70	2,365.11	178,415,837	173,044,260
North Oxfordshire	99,142.9	2,055.58	2,158.16	2,069.90	2,173.19	215,456,227	213,966,023
Ridgeway	172,957.1	2,009.70	2,109.99	2,073.09	2,176.54	376,447,517	364,936,871

This option has issues for the following reasons:
A Council cannot breach the referendum limit without undertaking a referendum, the results of which would be uncertain

The councils will not be fully established when the Council Tax needs to be set and a referendum would likely be an unpopular move and a poor start to the relations between the new council and their stakeholders.

E.3.2   Harmonising to the Highest band D without a 4.99% increase

Council tax referendum limits apply to the overall average band D of an authority. Harmonising to the highest band D in each unitary area but without a 4.99% increase would allow for harmonisation over a shorter period or with less adverse impact on those lower council tax areas. This can be shown in the tables below which shows the overall calculated yields when the highest Band D is applied to all areas:

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Table 4: Harmonising to the Highest band D without a 4.99% increase – Greater Oxford

Current Council	Greater Oxford						
	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £	Tax Base	Council Tax raised from Area £	Band D (excluding police) After Harmonisation £	Increase on Band D £	Increase on Band D %	Council Tax raised from Area After Harmonisation £
Oxford *	2,252.70	47,637.8	107,313,672	2,252.70	0.00	0.00	107,313,672
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	8,916.4	18,391,323	2,252.70	190.06	9.21	20,085,974
Vale of the White Horse	2,073.09	9,429.3	19,547,788	2,252.70	179.61	8.66	21,241,384
Cherwell	2,069.90	9,453.1	19,566,972	2,252.70	182.80	8.83	21,294,998
Total		75,436.6	164,819,755				169,936,029
Maximum Band D			2,252.70				
Council Tax Precept if a weighted average Council Tax increase of 4.99% was applied							173,044,261
Loss of Council Tax compared to applying a 4.99% rise							3,108,232

Excluding All Special Expenses

Table 5: Harmonising to the Highest band D without a 4.99% increase – North Oxfordshire

Current Council	North Oxfordshire						
	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £	Tax Base	Council Tax raised from Area £	Band D (excluding police) After Harmonisation £	Increase on Band D £	Increase on Band D %	Council Tax raised from Area After Harmonisation £
Cherwell	2,069.90	50,400.6	104,324,202	2,069.90	0.00	0.00	104,324,202
West Oxfordshire	2,040.78	48,742.3	99,472,372	2,069.90	29.12	1.43	100,891,749
Total		99,142.9	203,796,574				205,215,951
Maximum Band D			2,069.90				
Council Tax Precept if a weighted average Council Tax increase of 4.99% was applied							213,966,023
Loss of Council Tax compared to applying a 4.99% rise							8,750,072

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Table 6: Harmonising to the Highest band D without a 4.99% increase – Ridgeway

Current Council	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £	Tax Base	Council Tax raised from Area £	Band D (excluding police) After Harmonisation£	Increase on Band D £	Increase on Band D %	Council Tax raised from Area After Harmonisation £
			Ridgeway				
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	54,723.5	112,874,880	2,073.09	10.45	0.51	113,446,741
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09	49,722.2	103,078,596	2,073.09	0.00	0.00	103,078,596
West Berkshire	1,921.41	68,511.4	131,638,451	2,073.09	151.68	7.89	142,030,257
Total		172,957.1	347,591,927.0				358,555,593.0
Maximum Band D			2,073.09				
Council Tax Precept if a weighted average Council Tax increase of 4.99% was applied							364,936,764
Loss of Council Tax compared to applying a 4.99% rise							6,381,171

Applying this option would result in a loss to all of the Councils compared to applying rises based on a weighted average. This may be considered an acceptable cost to the new unitary authorities in order to ease the cost burden on individuals and / or to speed up harmonisation. Any council tax setting which does not take the maximum increase to the Band D charge will have ongoing year on year effects and the reduced council tax yield would roll forward from year to year and would be exacerbated by the loss of future percentage increases on the "lost" Band D charge.

E.4   Harmonising to the Lowest Band D with a 4.99% increase

Harmonising to the lowest band D in each unitary area would result in a lower council tax yield than the maximum increase that each council could levy without breaching the referendum limit. This can be shown in the table below which shows the overall calculated loss when a 4.99% increase is applied to the lowest Band D and applied to the entire area:

Table 7: Harmonising to the Lowest Band D with a 4.99% increase

Unitary	Tax Base	Weighted Average Band D £	Weighted Average Band D Plus 4.99% Increase £	Lowest Band D £	Lowest Band D Plus 4.99% Increase £	Loss of Council Tax by harmonising to lowest Band D (after 4.99% increase) £
Greater Oxford	75,436.6	2,184.88	2,293.90	2,062.64	2,165.57	9,681,344
North Oxfordshire	99,142.9	2,055.58	2,158.16	2,040.78	2,142.61	1,540,902
Ridgeway	172,957.1	2,009.70	2,109.99	1,921.41	2,017.29	16,032,296

If this option were to be chosen, the following would need to be considered:
Councils generally are under increasing financial pressure and increasing demand for services and council tax is a key income stream for councils to deal with the costs of demands on their services
Any reduction in the Band D charge will have ongoing year on year effects and the reduced council tax yield would roll forward from year to year and would be exacerbated by the loss of future percentage increases on the "lost" Band D charge.

E.5 Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D

Council tax referendum limits apply to the overall average band D of an authority. Harmonising to the weighted average band D would move all Council taxpayers to the weighted average with some moving up and some moving down. One-year harmonisation calculations are as follows:

Table 8: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Greater Oxford

Current Council	Greater Oxford						
	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £	Increase / (Decrease) to Weighted Average £	Increase / (Decrease) %	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average £	Total Increase £	Revised Council Tax £	Total Increase %
Oxford *	2,252.70	(67.82)	(3.01)	109.03	41.21	2,293.91	1.83
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	122.24	5.93	109.03	231.27	2,293.91	11.21
Vale of the White Horse	2,073.09	111.79	5.39	109.03	220.82	2,293.91	10.65
Cherwell	2,069.90	114.98	5.55	109.03	224.01	2,293.91	10.82
Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base 2,184.88				Gap from largest to smallest 190.06			

* Excluding All Special Expenses

Table 9: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – North Oxfordshire

Current Council	North Oxfordshire						
	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £	Increase / (Decrease) to Weighted Average £	Increase / (Decrease) %	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average £	Total Increase £	Revised Council Tax £	Total Increase %
Cherwell	2,069.90	(14.32)	(0.69)	102.57	88.25	2,158.15	4.26
West Oxfordshire	2,040.78	14.80	0.73	102.57	117.37	2,158.15	5.75
Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base 2,055.58				Gap from largest to smallest 29.12			

Table 10: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Ridgeway

Current Council	Ridgeway						
	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £	Increase / (Decrease) to Weighted Average £	Increase / (Decrease) %	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average £	Total Increase £	Revised Council Tax £	Total Increase %
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	(52.94)	(2.57)	100.28	47.34	2,109.98	2.30
Vale of White Horse	2,073.09	(63.39)	(3.06)	100.28	36.89	2,109.98	1.78
West Berkshire	1,921.41	88.29	4.60	100.28	188.57	2,109.98	9.81
Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base 2,009.70				Gap from largest to smallest 151.68			

Although it is preferable from an equity perspective to harmonise over one year, as can be seen from the tables above, it may be preferable to smooth the impact through an extended harmonisation period. This would reduce the year-on-year effect to individual council taxpayers. Potential phased harmonisation for Greater Oxford City Council could be as follows:

Table 11: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Greater Oxford 3 year Harmonisation

Greater Oxford	Over / (Under) the average £	Harmonisation effect over 3 years (per year) £
Oxford City	68	-23
South Oxfordshire Parishes	-122	41
Vale of White Horse Parishes	-112	37
Cherwell Parishes	-115	38
Maximum Variance	-122	41
Minimum Variance	68	-23

(N.B. a positive variance means the council tax would come down; a negative variance means that it needs to go up)

The difference between the highest and lowest Band D in the new North Oxfordshire and Ridgeway unitary authorities is not as large as that for Greater Oxford therefore the harmonisation could be undertaken over a shorter period:

Table 12: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Phased Harmonisation

	Years to Harmonise	Maximum Average Harmonisation upwards £	Maximum Average Harmonisation downward £
North Oxfordshire	1	-15.00	14.00
Ridgeway	2	-44.00	32.00

Unitary status and need for additional special expenses calculations
Council tax charging in Oxford City is different to that in the non-City areas being brought into the greater Oxford area. This is because the non-Oxford City areas rely more heavily on services being provided by the parishes. Due to this there is a relatively large difference between the district council tax of the City area and the new areas brought into Greater Oxford.

Based on the 2025/26 council tax levels, the average council tax for the new Greater Oxford area would be £2,184.88 excluding the parish charge and existing Oxford City Special Expenses.

However given the amount of the difference between the district charge from the City and that of the parished areas brought into the new unitary, along with the differences in the parish related band D, this is likely to be due to a disparity between the services provided by parishes in the Oxford City Area and those provided by parishes in the parished areas being brought into Greater Oxford. When there is a difference between areas for charging purposes there must be an adjustment called "special expenses" to remove double taxation. This would be in additional to the special expenses currently forming part of the council tax calculations for the current City Council.

A rough estimate of the effect of this would amend the Greater Oxford harmonisation position to the following:

Table 13: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Greater Oxford Special Expenses

Current Council	Greater Oxford (after Special Expenses Adjustment)						
	2025/26 Overall Band D (excluding police) £	Increase / (Decrease) to Weighted Average £	Increase / (Decrease) %	4.99% Increase on Weighted Average £	Total Increase £	Revised Council Tax £	Total Increase %
Oxford *	2,180.65	(41.27)	(1.89)	106.75	65.48	2,246.13	3.00
South Oxfordshire	2,062.64	76.74	3.72	106.75	183.49	2,246.13	8.90
Vale of the White Horse	2,073.09	66.29	3.20	106.75	173.04	2,246.13	8.35
Cherwell	2,069.90	69.48	3.36	106.75	176.23	2,246.13	8.51
Weighted Average = Total Council Tax Requirement divided by Tax base 2,139.38				Gap from largest to smallest 118.01			

* Excluding All Special Expenses

This would also have an effect on the phasing of harmonisation that could be applied. This can be shown as follows:

Table 14: Harmonising to the Weighted Average Band D – Greater Oxford Phased

Greater Oxford	Over / (Under) the average £	Harmonisation effect over 3 years (per year) £	Harmonisation effect over 2 years (per year) £
Oxford City	41	-14	-21
South Oxfordshire Parishes	-77	26	39
Vale of White Horse Parishes	-66	22	33
Cherwell Parishes	-69	23	35
Maximum Variance	-77	26	39
Minimum Variance	41	-14	-21

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Appendix F: Oxfordshire Waste & Environmental Services Transformation Programme (WESP)

Please see attached separate paper

Appendix G: Detailed Target Operating Model Blueprints

G.1 Early Intervention and Prevention

G.1.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford

Greater Oxford is a city region that contains deep diversity, both of communities and of experience. Home to some of the best academic institutions in the world, several wards (such as Jericho, Marston and North Oxford) rank as some of the least deprived in the country – with overall population health in areas such as regular physical activity and obesity being good.

However, other areas of the city region (such as Northfield Brook and Rose Hill) are amongst some of the most deprived areas in the country, with challenges around low household incomes, long-term unemployment and poor health outcomes being deep rooted. Many young people who grow up in Oxford do not see the immediate opportunities provided by the academic institutions and STEM fields as being relevant to them, risking further entrenching challenge within the home communities of the city. There is almost a 10-year life expectancy gap for men between those who live in the most and least affluent areas of the city.

According to external assessments[8], current statutory services at a county level do not have effective responses to people whose needs are complex but do not meet the statutory thresholds for support. With many support pathways being focused on the city, this drives a complexity of demand that the new unitary will need to effectively manage.

Additionally, cost of living challenges risks a wider range of people potentially requiring support. Oxford is one of the least affordable areas in the country to buy, with house prices at 13x the local salaries, and has some of the highest rents in the country – exacerbated by the local student population. This risks an expanded 'squeezed middle' facing housing and budgeting challenges – perhaps reflected in the fact that 28% of households presenting as homeless are in either full or part time employment.

However, there are strong foundations to build a preventative model upon. There are a wide range of local activists, including informal groups, community spaces, shops, businesses, faith groups, and voluntary organisations in all communities. These groups, relationships and spaces are critical in addressing social issues such as loneliness and inequality and play a vital role in supporting everyday prevention.

Alongside this there are complimentary offers from the existing local authorities and partners, including high-quality leisure offers available across the city region, offering residents tailored support around their physical wellbeing; significant grant funding to community groups, and community health and wellbeing workers in more deprived communities. Preventative work within homelessness has been nationally recognised for its positive outcomes, and community advice centres are already being funded within areas of the city that require additional support.

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[8] Oxfordshire CQC Assessment, 2025

G.1.2   Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

North Oxfordshire faces some of the opportunities and challenges that are typical of many rural areas, with dispersed communities across a large geographical footprint.

Market towns across the unitary face a range of pressures – from Banbury and Carterton having high levels of private rented sector tenures and comparative low levels of qualification across the population, to Chipping Norton's aging population and Witney's comparatively mixed self-reporting of good health. More rural areas face challenges around connectivity to social and physical infrastructure, with one GP surgery having over 40,000 registered patients. There are specific pressure on services due to domestic abuse and migration, which require tailored support to prevent residents from reaching crisis through effective outreach and partnership working.

There is a good local foundation upon which to build community-led solutions to these challenges. Existing community organisations provide both tailored support to specific communities and encourage community action in maintaining the local environment strengthening community relationships and pride in place; community spaces are located across both urban and rural areas and funding arrangements support VCSFE organisations to support their local communities.

G.1.3   Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

The Ridgeway footprint is one of many local strengths – health outcomes are largely positive for residents with over half reporting that they experience very good health, and deprivation levels across the footprint are lower than in the other two unitary authorities.

However, this broad picture of strength should not shy away from some potential risks for households in this geography. Nearly 1/3 of areas in Ridgeway are deprived because of distance from services, health infrastructure and affordable housing. Whilst some of this could be mitigated by personal car use (with around 88% of households in the area owning one or more vehicle) this may speak to communities who are distanced from public sector infrastructure.

With an older and ageing population compared to the other two unitary authorities, residents being enabled to remain at home for as long as possible will prevent a need for them to potentially move to more urban areas to access support – a challenge reflected in CQC reports for both Oxfordshire and Ridgeway. Attention should also be given to the younger population, particularly around mental wellbeing, to ensure residents are supported from their teenage years through to adulthood.

G.1.4   Recommended Approach

We recognise that many residents across the three unitary authorities can effectively support themselves, utilising community and family networks to develop their own resilience. A core principle of this approach is investment in the community sector, based on our belief that prevention is best done by communities, in communities, to enable a vibrant offer that enables residents to solve their own challenges, without requiring the support of the council or statutory services. Where residents do require a council intervention, our community partners will be equals in service delivery and support, with co-location of services where appropriate.

Effective early help blends three key support elements: community-based support, digital advice and guidance, and statutory services. Informal and grassroots networks play a vital role in everyday

wellbeing, digital tools help residents access timely information, and statutory services provide formal help for complex needs. A coordinated, integrated approach will ensure that people get the right help at the right time from people they trust.

By fostering closer collaboration with health and voluntary sector partners, the councils will be more effective in coordinating care, alleviating demand on services, and enhancing overall well-being. Services will be designed to prioritise dignity, personal choice, and accessible community-based support, thereby strengthening local resilience.

Whilst there will be a universal services approach in each unitary area, each of the unitary authorities should have a specific focus to meet the specific needs of their unitary:

- In Greater Oxford this should be focus on building resilience within the working age population, particularly focused on ensuring access to stable employment through reskilling where appropriate, maintaining tenancies and quality housing and supporting residents to manage their mental wellbeing.
- In Northern Oxfordshire, a unitary wide focus on reducing health inequalities and ensuring that all residents experience a good quality of life for all residents. This should particularly be supported by outreach around homelessness prevention and domestic abuse.
- For Ridgeway, an emphasis on ageing well and supporting residents to stay independent into older age through supporting community connection and support and supporting sustainable financial management into older age.

An insights and design function within each organisation will bring together data analytics capabilities with strategy, commissioning and operational staff to develop a deep understanding of the risk factors that may tip an individual into crisis enabling effective direction of operational colleagues and enabling collaboration with residents and partners to design new approaches to meeting needs where gaps are identified.

Operational delivery will be enabled through the bringing together of teams into one pathway from across unitary and district services, who will be able to effectively provide signposting to residents who just need one holistic conversation, but who can also hold cases where someone may need some extra support that does not yet require a statutory care intervention.

Two Public Health authorities – one hosted by Ridgeway and one across Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire to be hosted by one of these authorities. Each would have its own Director of Public Health and Deputy Director of Public Health and be able to focus particularly on the needs of its specific communities, in line with the priorities outlined above for each of the three unitary authorities. It is proposed to share the function across Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire for efficiencies due to their current smaller population sizes. This would not present an increase in staffing costs as there are currently two Directors and Deputy Directors of Public Health across the area – one each in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

G.1.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation

This model of early intervention and prevention will leverage existing community capacity, by avoiding the local authority duplicating existing effective networks but by ensuring they have the resources and autonomy to continue to meet the needs of residents as the area grows. The Council's role in supporting communities and connections with spaces where needed, co-location,

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and relational working will support innovation with our communities. Commissioning will be with communities and residents will be involved in design and decision making. This will create and support a rich tapestry building social capital and social connection to create more resilient communities.

By more effectively using the wealth of data that district and unitary organisations hold about their residents, the new unitary authorities will be able to better understand the root causes of demand and use this to identify households before they fall into crisis. This could look like using council tax arrears information to proactively target money management advice, or bereavement notifications to understand risks of isolation with older adults.

Breaking down service siloes will also be achieved by using the opportunity of unitarisation to bring together service functions that traditionally are dispersed across the organisation to enable residents to have access to a holistic approach to meeting their needs. Staff will be given the information and tools they need to have whole person conversations, that can result in individuals being signposted or having a team of professionals bought together to support them for a short period of time.

A focus on localised delivery will also enable the effective use of community assets. Neighbourhood working is a central tenant of the new Family Hub schemes, as well as the NHS Neighbourhood Health Plan – with both having a focus on new 'hubs' located in local areas. These, alongside existing community hubs, libraries, leisure centres and wider public sector partners, could provide a confusing and building-centred rather than person-centred approach to innovation. Establishing a new way of delivering resident facing services also means thinking about what services we can bring together in a way that makes the most sense to those who use them and releasing those are not required to effectively meet acute needs elsewhere – such as in care or education.

Partnership, culture, and commissioning practices are key to building trust and delivering prevention. In bringing these teams together and developing neighbourhood teams we will start with a focus on prevention that recognising the importance of community relationships and shared culture, requiring a focus on changing the prevailing culture of silo working. Building a collaborative team culture—where staff, partners and residents work together—is key, supported by shared behaviours.

Being able to focus support at a hyper local level across the three unitary authorities' neighbourhoods will enable the effective meeting of diverse local needs, whilst having a core focus on the need for continuous learning together, improvement and flexibility to meet the changing needs of residents in neighbourhoods, as areas grow in population and change in demographic needs.

At its core, the prevention approach will enable working alongside communities, focusing on what is strong with people and therefore reducing the level of crisis that residents experience, and by extension, the long-term support they would need from the council. This service will work alongside communities and partners taking a systems leadership role to support more resilient and better-connected communities across the city.

G.2 Adult Social Care

G.2.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford

Greater Oxford has a fundamentally different population of adults when compared to the rest of the Oxfordshire footprint. There is a smaller overall population of older adults, and a much higher proportion of working age adults – partially skewed by the presence of the university and the urban centre – meaning that adult social care support from prevention through to long-term care needs to meet these needs. There is also a need to ensure that the older population has access to timely and independence-focused support. Data suggests that older adults living in Greater Oxford are amongst the loneliest and isolated in the country; and there is a higher level of adults being admitted to hospital because of a fall[9].

Whilst the existing county-delivered social care service has been assessed as 'Good' by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), its areas of improvement are those which have the greatest impact on the city region. This includes ensuring there is clear communication with both residents and providers when individuals are discharged from hospital; supporting residents with complex needs – particularly related to mental health – within the local area; being able to deeply understand and reflect diverse experiences in social work practice and actively engaging with the VCSE.

Given the much higher levels of diversity within Greater Oxford (24.3% residents with an ethnicity other than White compared to 13.2% overall in Oxfordshire), the higher levels of mental health challenge than elsewhere in the county (with a slightly higher prevalence of suicide and admission to hospital due to mental health-related concerns) and a focus on a community-led approach to service delivery, the above speaks to Greater Oxford's need for unitarisation and their own approach to social care delivery.

There is already effective collaboration in place between district councils, social care and health, around both hospital discharge processes to avoid residents becoming long-term rough sleepers, and in the effective use of the nationally recognised Home Improvement Agency to enable people to remain independent at home for as long as possible.

G.2.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire will be a unitary that, according to the county's modelling[10] will result in the highest level of demand by the end of the forecast period. Whilst this increase in demand is across both the older adult and working age population, Northern Oxfordshire currently has the highest prevalence of dementia diagnosis out of the three unitary authorities, with cases currently in Cherwell increasing over recent years. This speaks to a need for services to consider how they can enable people to stay safe and independent at home, whilst also considering long-term independence for their residents.

Consideration will also need to be given to balancing service delivery between urban and rural centres. Demand is concentrated around Banbury, Chipping Norton and Witney as market centres, but can also be found spread across the Caversfield, Ambrosden and Fringford areas[11].

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[9] Oxfordshire JSNA
[10] Newton modelling for CCN/Oxfordshire
[11] Oxfordshire JSNA

Oxfordshire's CQC inspection found disparate availability of care provision in different area, our understanding is that Northern Oxfordshire is an area that currently as a disproportionate number of care beds compared to need, and future market development should consider how this can be better utilised and the market developed both in terms of core and cluster service delivery, and to ensure it is able to sustainably meet need in the long term.

G.2.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

Ridgeway on vesting day will inherit the largest proportion of adult social care demand, with a larger proportion of older adults. It should be noted that the area has a level of comparative affluence which may be hiding overall demand for services due to a higher number of self-funders. Whilst challenging to estimate, the ONS suggests that as many as 62% of residents in some areas of the new unitary will self-fund their care[12]. This requires the service to consider how it can support residents to make financial sustainable decisions about their long-term care, in addition to working with market providers to ensure the market remains affordable and equitable for those residents with a different level of income.

Around 22% of homes across Ridgeway are occupied by older adults and are considered underoccupied[13]. There is an opportunity for the area to develop a wider range of quality specialist housing options that can enable residents to access support as they age, whilst retaining independence and a feeling that they have a place called home. This would also enable the return of properties into the market for families.

As with Northern Oxfordshire, support services are typically concentrated around the urban centres and there is a need for the service to consider how to leverage rurality in developing hyper local, community rooted responses to meeting need – that move beyond the traditional forms of service and care delivery.

G.2.4 Recommended Approach

Each of the three unitary authorities should establish their own sovereign Adult Social Care service, run by their own Director of Adult Social Care. This arrangement should seek to continue the effective joint working that exists across the footprint with the local ICB (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West), but an individually focused service will enable the development and delivery of services that meet the specific needs of each area, driven by a deep understand of local strengths, assets and opportunities.

Partnership working between the 3 unitary authorities will be retained to address cross boundary challenges, such as retaining the cross-footprint Adult Safeguarding Board, and responding to demand pressures, such as hospital discharges through the winter months and cross-boundary provision.

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[12] Care homes & estimating the self-funding population, England, ONS (22/23)
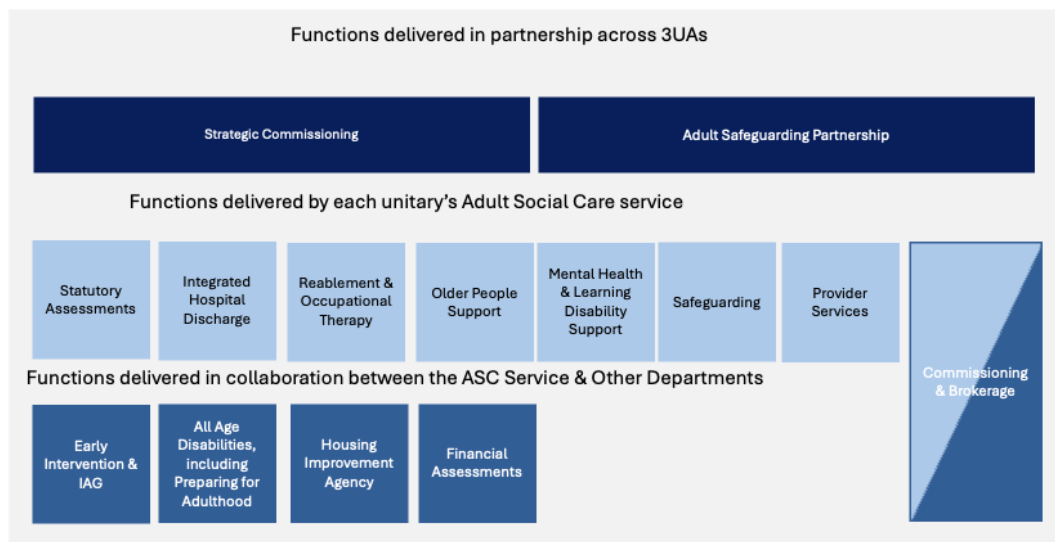[13] Overcrowding and under-occupancy by household characteristics, ONS

Fig F.1: Functions in the new Adult Social Care departments

G.2.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation

The entry point for many residents into Adult Social Care will not be directly into the service, but via the prevention pathway which will enable residents to be effectively connected to opportunities within the community without the need for a statutory assessment. This new single route to support will be enhanced by tools such as chatbots, which will enable digitally connected residents to self-serve on issues such as benefits and small technology. Social care staff will provide input into multi-agency meetings as appropriate but will only become responsible for an individual when it is deemed that they require a Care Act assessment. There will remain a route directly to the service for those residents who are in crisis, or for partners who have a safeguarding concern.

Short-term, enabling support will be an option for all residents – including those who are working age, shifting a default away from a package of support to the tools that a person may need to live an independent life.[14] In Greater Oxford, this could include greater focus on expanding relationships with local colleges in developing the supported internship programme and collaborating with local businesses to enable residents into long-term employment. Meanwhile, in Ridgeway this may include supporting residents to use equipment and technology to enable their independence within their own homes.

Existing strong collaboration between partners on the Out of Hospital Care pathway in Greater Oxford, and Healthy Bicester in North Oxfordshire, can be used as an exemplar for designing solutions to meet the needs of other residents experiencing complexity, particularly around mental health. The new unitary authorities will be well positioned to not only better understand the needs of their residents, but to use this information to work in collaboration with them to design support services.

Leveraging the experience that the districts have in developing housing solutions to meet resident needs will also enable accommodation which is fit for residents to live and age well within. There is an opportunity for the unitary authorities to be trailblazers in their approach to developing accommodation for adults with learning disabilities and mental health needs to age well within,

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[14] According to nationally available data, more working age adults in Oxfordshire receive long-term support after reablement compared to the majority of their peers

alongside its older population. Delivering future-proofed, affordable homes will not only enable greater independence and improved outcomes for residents but will enable a shift away from high-cost residential care placements currently used across the footprint.

G.3 Children's Services

G.3.1 Context and constraints: Greater Oxford

Greater Oxford's geography presents a distinct set of drivers leading to children and young people entering the care system compared to rural areas. The Unitary is more diverse, densely populated, has a unique set of social dynamics, and higher levels of deprivation. These factors combined create particular safeguarding issues and family and child-level vulnerabilities. Economic precarity (Greater Oxford has the highest number of households in temporary accommodation out of the three unitary authorities) in urban cities often translates into parents facing higher levels of mental health and substance misuse issues, leading to increased incidents of neglect and domestic abuse for children and young people. This phenomenon is seen across pockets of deprivation in Oxford City as Barton represents the highest combined number of children in need and child protection plans (56) across any MSOA area in the three proposed unitary authorities.

Whilst the existing county-delivered social care service has been assessed as 'Good' by Ofsted in its latest inspection, several areas of improvement remain that are crucial to preventing care entries, keeping children and young people safe and alleviating budget pressures. These include the need to bolster foster carer recruitment to reduce rising placements expenditure, timeliness of actions for children who have escalated to pre-proceedings and better transitional safeguarding arrangements between children's and adult social care services to prevent exploitation of care leavers. Educational attainment outcomes for children in care also require improvement.

A sovereign children's service will enable all three unitary authorities to individually and collectively address identified improvement areas. This will include localised transitional safeguarding policies and enhanced integration between social care, and the early intervention and prevention pathway which will provide a coordinated approach to supporting vulnerable young people transition safely into adulthood. Collaboration with the VCSE sector will be central to service delivery.

G.3.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire has the second highest number of children in need and child protection cases, the latter being 37% higher than Greater Oxford but 19% lower than Ridgeway, however the overall population (265,000) is far lower than Ridgeway (430,000). These statistics are driven by a multitude of factors including the higher levels of child poverty in Northern Oxfordshire (10.5% living in absolute poverty) which is nearly on par with Greater Oxford (11%), with deep pockets of deprivation including Banbury.

Service delivery will need to focus on enhancing and equipping locality teams based in high areas of need with the right expertise to tackle the challenges which arise in large rural geographical footprints, including child criminal exploitation. Proactive outreach and engagement with households will also be critical to identifying what can be a 'hidden' cohort within rural geographies and addressing household vulnerabilities early. The role of education as a safeguarding partner within multi-agency child protection teams (MACPTs) will be critical in early

identification of potential risk or harm to children and young people, i.e. children identified due to persistent absence. MACPTs will also be critical in implementing mechanisms to deliver wrap around support to children and families from partners including mental health, substance abuse and domestic abuse services.

### G.3.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

Ridgeway will inherit the highest demand for Children's Services across all thresholds including Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) cases – the total case load of child protection cases inherited by Ridgeway on vesting day will be 49% higher than that of Greater Oxford. Ridgeway also have twice as many early help cases compared Greater Oxford and 29% more than Northern Oxfordshire. These figures are indicative of the size and scale of Ridgeway but also the level of socio-economic inequality across the area with a third of areas in Ridgeway being deprived, this contributes to household instability and negatively impacts parental resilience.
This will require earlier intervention, and holistic support offers for families and multi-agency child protection teams to carefully manage and reduce risks, underpinned by clear operational thresholds.

Ridgeway also has approximately 17% more children and young (CYP) placed in residential settings, 62% more CYP in IFA placements compared to Greater Oxford and 22% more than Northern Oxfordshire – accounting for approximately 42% of overall placement expenditure across the three unitary authorities. This will require a revised strategy in relation to sufficiency planning at a three-unitary level, investment into in-house foster capacity and capability and an operational focus on providing the right types of support packages and interventions. These factors combined will help to reduce children's needs and enable transition into lower cost placements with the overarching ambition of achieving permanence.

G.3.4 Recommended Approach

Each of the three unitary authorities should establish their own sovereign Children's Social Care Service, run by their own Director of Children's Social Care and senior management team to heighten service accountability and oversight. Each Unitary will recruit additional specialist staff as part of implementing the Family First Partnership Programme. The authority will continue to maintain core county-level strategic partnerships and work together on critical areas to maintain quality, efficiency and market stability; Greater Oxford will also consider joint commissioning in areas where there are workforce shortages to ensure consistent service delivery across all three unitary authorities.
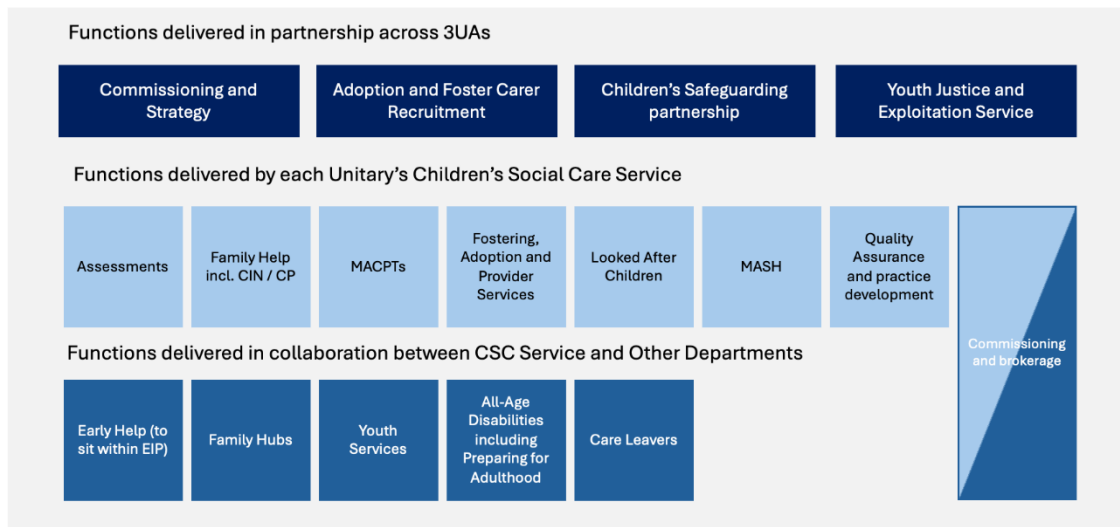
Fig F.2: Functions of the future CSC model

G.3.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking innovation

The referral source into the Children's Social Care service will vary based on the referring safeguarding partner or individual. However, the Early Intervention and Prevention (EI&P) pathway will triage referrals (through multi-agency meetings where required) to ensure they reach the appropriate threshold and social care team; direct referral routes will remain open for cases where there are serious safeguarding concerns.

It is anticipated that the EI&P function will lead to more households being identified early to access universal and early help services to prevent escalation to statutory support services. This will be achieved through other functions including money and debt management and advice and employment and skills support, proactively identifying and addressing family circumstances that can contribute to its breakdown. This approach tackles the root causes in families to maximise opportunities to address core risks and prevent care entries. If needs cannot be met by the early help function, the appropriate assessment will be undertaken to ensure the child is provided with the support required for them to achieve and maintain a reasonable level of health and development.

The early help offer will adopt the Family First Partnership Programme ethos of making early support everybody's business – this will involve a county-wide, multi-agency commitment to provide social, health and educational support as needs emerge. Work will be family-led, and practitioners will be trained in restorative practice to build trusted relationships with families. All three unitary authorities will adopt a joint practice framework to ensure consistency in service delivery across the footprint.

Greater Oxford will harness its expertise in developing housing solutions to meet the varied needs of cohorts who are currently or have been in care to improve their life outcomes. This will encompass exploration of accommodation options (based on a thorough local needs assessment) including respite care centres to support families to manage needs of children with disabilities.

G.4 SEND and Education

G.4.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford

The three unitary authorities proposal aims to address the differing needs of all areas and populations which will be analysed in more detail to determine the exact type of provision required to meet needs based on hyper-local insights at the implementation stage. The core drivers of cost for SEND services in Oxfordshire are aligned to those recognised nationally – a rapid rise in home to school transport and expensive privately sourced placements. In particular, and often out of county, independent non-maintained special school (INMSS) placements. The average annual cost of an INMSS placement per pupil with an EHCP reached £119,340 by 2024/25 and home to school transport annual expenditure now exceeds the total cost of maintained special schools.

This has created a financially unsustainable position for Oxfordshire with a projected £100m high needs blocks deficit by March 2026. This requires more local provision closer to home for children and young people with SEND and earlier identification and mobilisation of the right types of support. The three unitary authorities proposal provides Oxfordshire with an opportunity to rapidly achieve this ambition through enhanced integration between key functions including housing, planning, education and transport. Each unitary will also have control of funding from the dedicated schools grant to design and deliver provision and make operational changes based on local insights.

The improvement areas identified by Ofsted in 2023 would be best addressed through the 3UA model, these include: insufficient special schools, quality and timeliness of EHC(P) assessments, waiting times for neurodevelopmental assessments, strategic oversight of alternative provision and early intervention and agencies within the local area partnership. Three sovereign services would enable robust operational and strategic oversight, more local integration and localised decision making - creating the ability for unitary authorities to be responsive to local needs. Each unitary will have budgetary responsibilities to make improvements across areas of high expenditure to release monies that can be invested in resource bases and creating more inclusive settings for children and young people.

Greater Oxford represents the lowest spend across all placement types accounting for 24% of all placement expenditure in 2024/25. The unitary also scores lowest on the number of children and young people severely and persistently absent across 2024/25. Improvement initiatives should focus on reducing the total number of INMSS placements (141) which are only 25% lower than Northern Oxfordshire and boosting educational outcomes. Oxford has a significant proportion of its areas in the most deprived 30% in England, 20% of the most deprived areas are also amongst the 10% most deprived for education, skills and training. Some of these areas are located within Greater Oxford requiring a focus on early identification of SEND needs and a robust Early Years offer.

G.4.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire represents 31% of all SEND placements across the three Unitarities and accounts for 30% of the overall SEND placement expenditure, (6% higher than Greater Oxford but 16% lower than Ridgeway). 39% of the unitary authority's overall placement expenditure is apportioned to INMSS placements. Northern Oxfordshire accounts for the second highest overall

percentage of children and young people who are severely absent (29%). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that 54% of all SEND placements across the footprint are accommodated within mainstream settings, marginally higher than Greater Oxford and Ridgeway.

This suggests inclusive settings and approaches are embedded in the system which can be further enhanced through new initiatives focused on mainstream inclusion and preventative work. Northern Oxfordshire has deep pockets of deprivation across many areas including Didcot and Banbury – given the prevalence of children with SEND in low-income households, Northern Oxfordshire can explore expansion of SEND hubs or other appropriate provision in areas of highest need. Innovative strategies to tackle persistent absence can be adopted based on root causes including emotionally based school avoidance pathways and transport solutions.

G.4.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

Ridgeway has the highest annual expenditure on SEND Placements across INMSS, MSS, Mainstream and other provision, accounting for 47% of total spend on INMSS placements. Ridgeway also has the highest number of annual exclusions (32) which is exponentially higher than Greater Oxford (8) and Northern Oxfordshire (9). The number of children and young people severely absent is also 38% higher than Northern Oxfordshire and 48% more than figures in Greater Oxford.

This indicates that that the current education system needs to focus on establishing inclusive settings that meet the needs of children and young people; Ridgeway also has the lowest number of mainstream school capacity (290 placements) which is less than half of available capacity in Greater Oxford (690) and the Northern Oxfordshire (642). Ridgeway's rural geography has meant it has contributed to rising transport related costs for children with SEND.

G.4.4 Recommended Approach

Each of the three unitary authorities should establish their own sovereign SEND and Education service run by their own Children's Social Care Director and Senior Management team to develop a local response whilst continuing collaboration across the county footprint on critical areas, including commissioning of specialist support and mobilisation of virtual hubs.
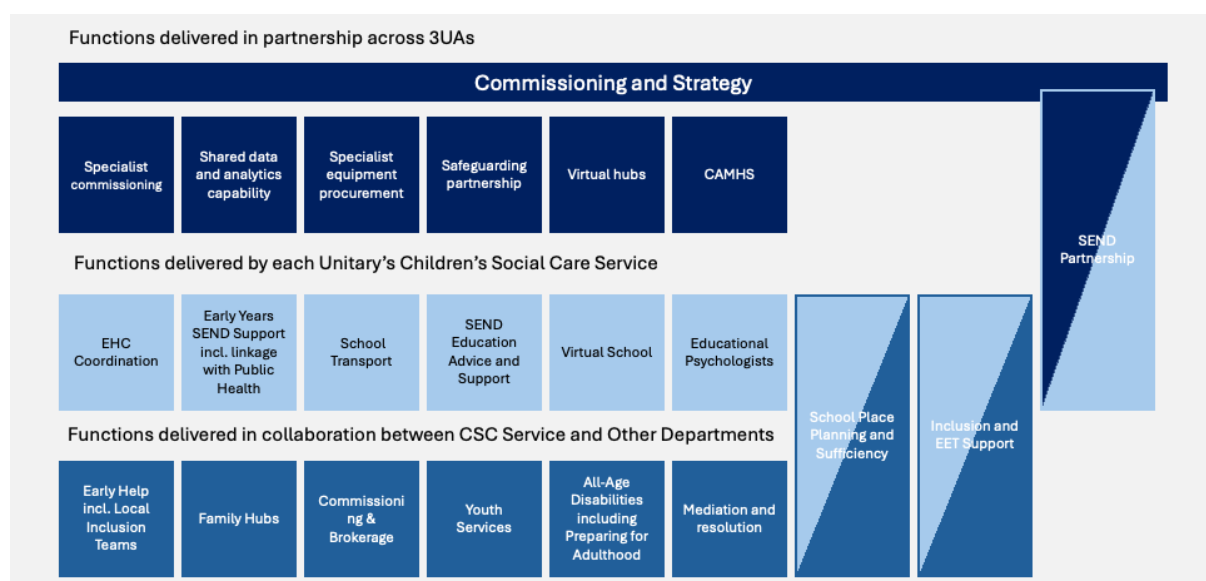
Fig F.3: Functions of the future SEND model

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G.4.5 Achieving Outcomes, Unlocking Innovation

Similar to the Children's Social Care model, children and young people will be referred through various sources including parents and multi-agency partners (i.e. GPs, Speech and Language Therapists and SENCOs). Families will benefit from the Early Intervention and Prevention function which will help parents to access all universal and non-statuary level support as they initiate the assessment processes for EHC(P)s. This will help to maintain family resilience, for example through providing financial and employment support or signposting parents to local parent carer forums to be part of their peer networks. The local offer and processes will be made accessible to ensure parents can benefit from all types of support including SEND short breaks.

EHC coordinators will be critical to establishing trusted relationships with parents to advise and support them through the EHCP assessment process and ensure it is completed in a timely and high-quality manner. Plans will be reviewed regularly to meet the evolving needs of children and young people as they enter key transition periods. The Teams Around Schools (TAS) model will enable multi-disciplinary teams to integrate support services into the school environment to identify and intervene early through a family-centred approach. This will reduce exclusions, improve attendance and outcomes for children with SEND. Dedicated Inclusion Support Teams comprised of specialist staff to aid schools in supporting children with more complex needs and behaviours will also be explored.

Transitions and achieving independence are critical periods and milestones for children and young people with SEND, requiring detailed planning and early collaboration with other services including Adult Social Care which will comprise of an All-Age Disability service to provide continuous person-centred and multi-agency support.

The service will also utilise emerging artificial intelligence solutions to boost workforce productivity, helping staff to complete administrative tasks including assessments at a faster pace to focus their resource on direct work with children and families.

G.5 Enabling Services

G.5.1 Context and Constraints: Greater Oxford

Greater Oxford is predominantly the city and urban extensions, with large outlying settlements at Wheatly and Berinsfield, and a number of rural villages in the greenbelt. The proposal also envisages significant commercial and housing development, which will require additional enabling services support.

The city population is younger and more diverse than the surrounding areas, and areas of deprivation exist within Oxford and Berinsfield. This raises challenges for customer support, delivering for complex needs in these areas while ensuring the needs of the older rural population are also met. The combination of service touch-points, call centre and digital-self-service will be designed to meet these differing needs.

This authority will have significant assets, both in social housing and comparatively high holdings in commercial assets. These require support services, including legal, planning and maintenance services, but are a source of revenue and collateral.

Oxford City Council has a policy of in-sourcing services to its two wholly-owned Latco companies, delivering housing and facilities management. These companies return a dividend to the council, and it is expected that these will transfer into the new authority, with potential to expand the scale of their operations.

As a newly formed unitary council, Greater Oxford will need to establish legal and professional services at a scale to support specialist recruitment, staff retention and delivery of statutory and regulatory services.

G.5.2 Context and Constraints: Northern Oxfordshire

Northern Oxfordshire is a largely rural unitary area served by a number of market towns, including growing urban settlements around Banbury and Bicester and Heyford Park, as well as a planned new urban settlement at Salt Cross.

As set out in the Demographic Distinctiveness section of the proposal, there are some stark demographic contrasts. Banbury has areas of significant deprivation, while the rural western area which is more wealthy but also aging.

In terms of service delivery, this requires a focus on delivering for complex needs in urban areas, whilst being able to deliver a wide range of trusted services across a dispersed rural population. Physical delivery of services across a very rural geography is challenging, and requires a mix of targeted support for service access alongside digital self-serve and call-based options.

As a new unitary authority, Norther Oxfordshire will need to establish professional support services at a scale to support specialist recruitment, staff retention and delivery of statutory and regulatory services.

Under current arrangements West Oxfordshire is a shareholder in two Latcos, and it is expected that this shareholding will transition to the new authority.

ICT contracts, data assurance and service availability will be critical to delivering a wide range of services across a dispersed geography.

G.5.3 Context and Constraints: Ridgeway

This area brings together existing unitary services from West Berkshire with district services from South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse. It is anticipated that the majority of unitary structures and service support will be built out from the existing model for West Berkshire, with relevant staff from South, Vale and Oxfordshire County Council moving into roles in the new authority.

This is a large and rural area, with a small number of busy market towns. The Science Vale is a growth area for the knowledge economy and includes two enterprise zones which provide business rate revenue to the local council.

This authority will be formed of an existing unitary council and two district councils. West Berkshire's unitary structure will provide the framework to expand and the range of statutory and

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regulatory services and support service transformation. Professional support services will need to expand in line with delivering across an expanded geography.

Physical delivery of services across a very rural geography is challenging, and requires a mix of targeted support for service access alongside digital self-serve and call-based options.

G.5.4 Recommended Approach

Service	Service Model	Model Detail
Finance	In-house delivery per unitary	Finance will consolidate district-led services (e.g. revenues and benefits) to unlock scale economies. The model aims to establish financially sustainable councils through strategic planning, improved accountancy, and leveraging buying power. Efficiencies will be reinvested to boost service quality.
Democratic Services	Mix of shared elements & in-house delivery	Each unitary will operate a Leader and Cabinet model supported by a centralised Democratic Services team and dedicated scrutiny arms. A new constitution, electoral systems, and committee structures will be established. For shared services and partnerships that run across the LGR area, rationalisation and joint working will ensure consistency of support.
HR and OD	In-house delivery per unitary	A centralised HR service will lead cultural integration, talent management, and organisational development. It will embed high-performance cultures, ensure legal compliance, and support flexible, values-based working. Economies of scale will be achieved without compromising responsiveness.
ICT and Digital	In-house delivery per unitary	ICT will underpin a unified digital workplace via a shared Microsoft 365 tenant. It will consolidate infrastructure, harmonise systems, and enhance cyber security. The phased rollout will align with contract expiries and support transformation through automation and data innovation.
Transformation & PMO	In-house delivery per unitary	Two PMOs (Development and Operational) will oversee the transition programme for at least two years. A core team will be supported by seconded specialists. The PMO will provide governance, drive change, and ensure coherent delivery across all workstreams.
Legal	In-house delivery per unitary	Each unitary will provide its own legal services to support effective and compliant delivery.
Audit	In-house delivery per unitary	Each unitary will maintain an internal audit plan, charter, and risk strategy. External auditors will be appointed to oversee account closure. Audit committees will provide governance.
Procurement	In-house delivery per unitary	A modern, integrated procurement unit will reduce contract duplication and streamline commissioning. Shared frameworks and a single contract register will improve efficiency and enable market development.
Strategy & Policy	In-house delivery per unitary	This function will coordinate strategic planning, statutory business plans, and policy development. It will support leadership teams, ensure compliance, and enable strategic coherence across unitary authorities. Automation will drive future cost savings.

Data & Insight	In-house delivery per unitary	The data & insight teams will expand to manage richer, integrated data across new geographies. It will support evidence-based decision-making, strategic partnerships, and performance monitoring. Investment in tools and skills will be essential.
Customer Services	In-house delivery per unitary	A single digital layer will enable joined-up contact centres and application processing. Community-based touchpoints and digital-first design will improve access and responsiveness, while delivering efficiency gains.
Communications	In-house delivery per unitary	Communications teams will be TUPE'd and streamlined, with 25% efficiency savings expected. Internal comms will embed new cultures. Digital-by-design approaches, including AI and video, will enhance accessibility and support further savings.

Appendix H: Implementation RAID Log

This high-level Risk, Assumptions, Issues, and Dependencies (RAID) log has been developed alongside the target operating model design and draws on previous transformation best practice and guidance from other areas who have undertaken LGR. It provides a consolidated view of key transition challenges and considerations, grouped under our four guiding principles for local government reorganisation:

- Community & people centred design
- System innovation & transformation
- Financial sustainability
- Governance & control

Each entry in the log is structured to support clear understanding and prioritisation:

- Type – Identifies whether the item is a *Risk*, *Assumption*, *Issue*, or *Dependency*.
- Description – Summarises the concern or dependency and outlines its potential implications.
- Rating – Indicates the level of priority (*High*, *Medium*, *Low*) based on urgency and strategic importance. This is not a measure of impact likelihood, but rather a guide for focus and resource allocation.
- Mitigation – Suggests actions or strategies that could reduce negative impacts or support successful delivery.

This RAID log is intended to support programme governance, enable proactive risk management, and ensure alignment with our strategic principles throughout the transition process.

Community & People Centred Design

Type	Description	Rating	Mitigation
Risk	Loss of institutional knowledge due to staff turnover caused by change	Medium	Prioritise retention of key officers and knowledge transfer mechanisms
Risk	Some managers may lack capability or capacity to lead transition	Medium	Bring in additional transition capacity where needed and provide support to those leading transition
Risk	Formation of new workforce groups may erode strong organisational cultures	Medium	Build new organisational identity and values-based culture
Risk	Engaging multiple unions may result in inconsistent approaches	Medium	Develop a coordinated union engagement strategy
Assumption	Unions and workforce reps will engage constructively	Medium	Maintain open communication and early involvement

System Innovation & Transformation

Type	Description	Rating	Mitigation
Risk	Payroll errors during system migration	High	Implement robust testing and validation of payroll systems
Risk	Complexities in splitting shared staff and services	High	Develop clear workforce allocation protocols and legal frameworks

Risk	HR teams may lack capacity for transformation	High	Increase HR resourcing and prioritise transformation support
Risk	Multiple employment terms complicate harmonisation	Medium	Establish harmonisation working group and legal review
Risk	Unsupported systems may need replacing	Medium	Map systems and contract end dates; plan phased replacement
Risk	Data migration may result in inaccuracies or breaches	High	Conduct data cleansing and mapping exercises
Risk	New social care systems may not be ready by vesting day	Medium	Prioritise safe and legal service continuity; monitor provider readiness
Risk	Barriers to multi-agency data sharing	Medium	Develop data-sharing agreements and protocols
Dependency	Payroll and workforce migration depends on timely access to data	High	Secure early access and validate data integrity
Dependency	EI&P success depends on culture, legislation, and financial support	High	Align leadership support and legislative compliance

Financial Sustainability

Type	Description	Rating	Mitigation
Risk	Financial pressures may discourage investment in EI&P	Medium	Embed prevention in operating model and use digital tools for efficiency
Assumption	Public Health and ICT leads will be engaged	Medium	Confirm availability and integrate into planning early
Dependency	Harmonisation of terms depends on HR coordination	Medium	Establish cross-council coordination group(s)

Governance & Control

Type	Description	Rating	Mitigation
Risk	Employment law changes may lead to non-compliance	Medium	Monitor legislation and coordinate implementation across councils
Risk	Planning policy changes may cause market uncertainty	Low	Monitor developments and engage with planning teams
Risk	Electoral boundary changes require additional work	Medium	Plan consultation and resource allocation early
Dependency	Electoral boundary changes depend on Commission approval	Medium	Maintain dialogue with Boundary Commission and prepare contingencies
Assumption	Government decisions will be announced in time	Medium	Maintain ongoing engagement with central government
Assumption	HR and transition teams will have authority and capacity to lead change	Medium	Confirm governance structures and empower teams

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