

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 November 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee relating to the Local Government Reorganisation

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To submit the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee for Cabinet's consideration regarding the Local Government Reorganisation.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	Good, affordable homes Strong, fair economy Thriving communities Zero carbon Oxford A well-run council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet:
1. Considers and responds to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee convened a Special meeting on 5 November 2025 to consider the proposals for the local government reorganisation. 3 models were

reviewed including the Three Unitary Authorities (“3UA”), Two Unitary Authorities (“2UA”), and Single Unitary Authority (“1UA”).

2. Cabinet, at its Special meeting on 10 November 2025, will consider the three proposals developed by Oxfordshire and West Berkshire councils for the creation of unitary local government and to agree Oxford City Council’s preferred proposal for submission to Government by 28 November 2025.
3. Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 grants the Scrutiny Committee to make reports or recommendations to Cabinet with respect to the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive; and on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area.

Summary of discussions

4. Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, together with Caroline Green, Chief Executive and Mish Tullar, Transition Director, presented Oxford City Council’s developed proposal for the creation of three unitary authorities in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.
5. The Committee posed a wide range of questions and reflected a number of concerns raised by communities likely to be affected by the proposed reorganisation.
6. Firstly, on representation and democratic voice, members explored how Oxford’s influence would be maintained within a wider Mayoral Strategic Authority (“MSA”). It was acknowledged that the 3UA model would ensure both urban and rural voices are heard equitably – a marked improvement on the largely rural-dominant alternatives under which Oxford’s voice risked being diluted. The Committee also heard that this model aligns well with the MSA framework by allowing strategic issues such as transport and regional development to be managed regionally, while keeping local decision-making rooted in communities. Whereas the MSA’s voting arrangements could otherwise marginalise Oxfordshire’s main urban area, the 3UA proposal offers a measure of structural balance and parity.
7. Recognising that voluntary organisations are vital to civic life, members raised concerns about the pressures faced by these groups, particularly outside Oxford and Banbury, and whether the 3UA model could better support these groups. The Committee was informed that the place-based approach inherent in 3UA offers opportunities for closer collaboration at local levels while still supporting county-wide voluntary initiatives. This, in turn, would help enable stronger partnerships between authorities and the voluntary sector and ensure smaller organisations are not left isolated from wider strategic support.
8. Touching on place-based identity, members questioned how the proposed boundaries had been drawn and to what extent they reflected existing community identities. The Committee was informed that boundaries were chosen to preserve a genuine sense of place and to avoid destabilising established communities. Whilst alternative border configurations were explored, further expansion of boundaries risked undermining local coherence. The 3UA proposal respects historic district boundaries while allowing the Boundary Commission to review and refine details at a later stage. Furthermore, enabling high density development of 2.6% of the Green Belt for housing and business close to Oxford was a highlighted key principle in the

3UA model, distinguishing it from rival models that could open the door to more dispersed greenfield development, with a higher overall land take. Lastly, 3UA presents opportunities to strengthen parish and neighbourhood governance within each unitary area, deepening grassroots engagement which addresses one of the essential criteria.

9. The Committee then examined issues of staff transitions, job losses and financial management associated with the reorganisation. It was explained that the transition from seven to three authorities will involve restructuring, though redundancies are expected to be minimal and focused largely at senior management levels. Staff would be protected under TUPE regulations to ensure pay and conditions are preserved. The transition is expected to unfold over several years, with implementation targeted for 2028, following Government consultation which is anticipated for 2026. Financially, the transition would be self-funded, as no direct Government support is expected. However, Oxfordshire County Council has set aside £10m to cover mobilisation costs regardless of which proposal is ultimately approved, and Oxford City Council and other districts were expected to make provisions for contributions to these costs within their 2026/27 Budgets.
10. In discussion of implementation and next steps, the Committee learned that shadow authorities will receive transitional funding from existing council reserves, with cost-sharing across all current authorities. The Committee acknowledged the complexity of the transition but expressed confidence that the 3UA model is deliverable and sustainable over the long term.
11. With respect to the other models, the Committee noted that while both the Two Unitary Authorities and Single Unitary Authority proposals envisaged collaborative approach with neighbouring areas, the 1UA is characterised by a drive toward a full administrative merger – a position that diverges sharply from the more localised philosophies underpinning the 3UA proposal.
12. The Committee expressed strong concern that the 1UA proposal risks losing local identity and accountability, noting its lack of references to regional distinctions, community needs, or demographic diversity. The Committee warned that this centralisation could overlook critical opportunities to tailor policies and service delivery to Oxfordshire's varied urban and rural contexts, thereby weakening local democratic engagement and representation.

Final reflections and recommendation

13. Throughout its consideration of the proposals, the Committee's discussion reflected a strong desire for a model of local government that is both ambitious in scope and grounded in local realities. The Committee consistently returned to the need for a structure that delivers meaningful local representation, protecting community identity and ensures sustainable service delivery over the long term.
14. Overall, the Committee expressed confidence that the 3UA proposal embodies the principles of place-based governance, local empowerment and practical deliverability. It was affirmed that this model represented the most practical, community-led and balanced path forward.
15. Accordingly, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to put to Cabinet its support for this model and recommend that the **Three Unitary Authorities proposal be formally**

submitted as Oxford City Council's preferred model for local government reorganisation to Government.

Acknowledgements

16. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank the Cabinet for the cross-party way in which the proposals were developed and the opportunity benefitted to Council members to feed into the process at various points, and again the discussions with Scrutiny at this meeting, with particular thanks to Councillor Susan Brown (Leader, Partnership Working). The Committee is also grateful to Caroline Green (Chief Executive), Mish Tullar (Transition Director), Nigel Kennedy (Group Finance Director), Bill Lewis (Financial Accounting Manager), Emma Jackman (Director of Law, Governance & Strategy) (Monitoring Officer), Lucy Cherry (Policy and Partnerships Officer), Clare Keen (Policy and Partnerships Officer), and Jonathan Malton (Committee and Member Services Manager) and all involved for their contributions in this process.
17. Minutes of the Special Scrutiny meeting on 5 November 2025 can be viewed [here](#).

Financial implications

18. Financial implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
19. Where appropriate, any further financial implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Legal issues

20. Legal implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
21. Where appropriate, any further legal implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Level of risk

22. Risk Registers, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
23. Where appropriate, the risk register was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Equalities impact

24. Equalities Impact Assessments, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
25. Where appropriate, the Equalities Impact Assessments was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

26. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.

27. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

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**Table 1 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Local Government Reorganisation**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee at their Special meeting on 5 November in respect of the proposals to be submitted by Oxford City Council for the local government reorganisation. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) The Scrutiny Committee recommends that the Three Unitary Authorities proposal be formally endorsed and submitted as Oxford City Council's preferred model for local government reorganisation to Government.	Yes	This is line with officers' recommendation, that Cabinet submits the 3UA LGR proposal to Government.