

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 4 December 2025  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee

| Summary and recommendations  |                                                                                      |
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| <b>Decision being taken:</b> | To submit the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee for Cabinet’s consideration. |
| <b>Key decision:</b>         | No                                                                                   |
| <b>Lead Member:</b>          | Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee                              |
| <b>Corporate Priority:</b>   | A Well-Run Council                                                                   |
| <b>Policy Framework:</b>     | None                                                                                 |

| Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet:                                                                    |
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| 1. <b>Consider and respond</b> to the comments 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 met on 2 December and reviewed a Cabinet report endorsing the submission by Oxfordshire County Council on behalf of Oxfordshire councils of an Expression of Interest to Government for the inclusion of the Thames Valley area in the next wave of its Devolution Programme.
2. This report summarises the reflections of the Committee for Cabinet’s consideration at their Special meeting on 4 December 2025.

## Summary of discussions

3. Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, together with Mish Tullar, Transition Director, presented the report noting Cabinet's endorsement of Oxfordshire County Council's Expression of Interest to Government for including the Thames Valley region in the next round of Devolution.
4. Whilst no formal timeline exists at this stage, the Leader noted this as a turning point at which the process of establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley would begin, if successful. She referred to the collaborative work undertaken and challenges involved, highlighting the extensive discussions with other authorities and efforts from members and officers alike, and noted Buckinghamshire's consistent expression of disinterest to be included in the proposed MSA. In linking local government reorganisation to the wider MSA concept, the Transition Director explained that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals must address and support work brought upon by Devolution. Assurance was offered that the Three Unitary Authority (3UA) model indeed meets this criterion. He emphasised that no decision was to be made at this stage, and that there will be an opportunity to consider this in due course. The proposal was also noted to be in line with the ambitions of the Oxford Growth Commission with regards to establishing the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.
5. Reflecting on LGR, the Committee raised uncertainties about how the 3UA model relates to the larger concept of a Thames Valley MSA. Members asked about the Government's position on the MSA, in contrast to the more complex LGR landscape, and whether the MSA process might progress more smoothly given the broad agreement amongst authorities. In seeking further clarity, the Committee noted potential synergies between a smaller, place-based unitary and a larger strategic authority capable of securing investment and delivering major transport, planning and long-term environmental projects which could be channelled to local areas. The 3UA model was reiterated as essential to ensuring Oxford retains a meaningful voice within any future MSA, particularly given that this influence could be diminished under a county-wide unitary.
6. Some concerns were raised about Oxford identity in the Thames Valley, noting that many residents may not instinctively identify with the area, and the need to clearly communicate the benefits of Devolution including powers over issues like planning, infrastructure, skills and potentially tourism levies. The Committee then queried Swindon's place within the proposed geography, and noted that Swindon, not only initiated early discussions, but has strong economic and business links with Oxford, and is naturally aligned with the Thames Valley economy. Further to this, Swindon is viewed as a logical western end to the Oxford-Cambridge corridor.
7. Additionally, the Committee sought clarity on several governance-related issues: what arrangements are likely to accompany a MSA and how these would align with what the Council's current position; what decision-making powers would the Council retain or gain; how successful initiatives such as Oxford Direct Services (ODS) would be safeguarded within a larger strategic structure. It was explained that governance discussions will form the next stage once Government's response is known, and that a collegiate model is being explored. The Committee noted that whilst certain decisions would rest with the Mayor, the system is designed to avoid unilateral imposition. Lastly, in relation to devolved powers and budgets, the Committee heard that these would likely include strategic planning (for example, housing and environmental sustainability targets) and strengthened by the soft power of representing a large, economically strong region.

8. The Committee made no formal recommendations but noted the report and the detailed discussions.
9. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank Cabinet particularly Cllr Susan Brown (Leader, Partnership Working), Caroline Green (Chief Executive) and Mish Tullar (Transition Director) for the consistent collaborative engagement with Scrutiny.

### **Financial implications**

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

### **Legal issues**

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

### **Level of risk**

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

### **Equalities impact**

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

### **Carbon and Environmental Considerations**

18. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
19. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

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