

Decision type:	Single Member Decision
Decision date:	13 July 2026
Decision maker:	Leader, and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, Inclusive Economic Growth and Culture
Decision title:	Project approval to initiate procurement for a Strategic Partner to support Oxford City Council in the design and implementation of a Greater Oxford subject to the Government's LGR decision.

Summary	
Decision being taken:	Project approval to initiate a procurement process for a Strategic Partner to support Oxford City Council in the design and implementation of a Greater Oxford in the event that the 3 Councils Local Government Reorganisation submission is confirmed by Government as their preferred model for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. Contract value is expected to be c£850,000, therefore award of contract subject to Cabinet key decision.
Key decision:	No
Source of delegation:	Subject to the decision and in accordance with 19.16, 19.17 and 18.12 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Member is asked to delegate authority to the Transition Director, in consultation with the Group Finance Director, initiation of the procurement process. Cabinet approval will be required before a contract can be signed – this is currently on the Forward Plan for August Cabinet as a key decision.
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader, and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, Inclusive Economic Growth and Culture
Corporate Priority:	Well Run Council
Policy Framework:	Constitution sections 19.16 19.17, and 18.12

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, Inclusive Economic Growth and Culture decides as follows:

- To grant project approval** for officers to initiate a procurement process for a Strategic Partner to support Oxford City Council in the design and

implementation of a Greater Oxford, in the event that the 3 Councils Local Government Reorganisation submission is confirmed by Government as their preferred model for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

2. **To delegate** authority to the Transition Director to undertake the procurement, in consultation with the Group Finance Director.

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix One	EQIA GO Strategic Partner Project Approval	No

Introduction and background

1. Following an invitation from Government, in November 2025, the Council submitted a 3 Councils (3Cs) proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.
2. The Government is expected to announce its decision for its preferred model for LGR in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire by 16 July 2026
3. All councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire are working collaboratively in preparations for the transition to new unitary local authority structures.
4. At that systemwide level, it is expected that specialist consultancy support will be procured to support the LGR Programme Implementation Team, which will involve senior officers of all existing councils. Support will be needed at a systemwide level to navigate the complex disaggregation of existing councils and integration of systems, assets and workforces into new authorities. If Government chooses the 3 Councils option proposal, as architect of the proposal Oxford City Council will also require specialist consultancy support to develop and implement detailed designs for a Greater Oxford Council. The contract would be a smaller and more focused assignment than the systemwide consultancy contract, with both providers working in partnership with the overall LGR Implementation Team. Procurement of a strategic partner is therefore considered necessary to ensure smooth transition of LGR and therefore critical. There is urgency in moving ahead with procurement ahead of - and contingent upon - the Government's decision for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire due to competition in the market nationally for limited specialist consultancy resources, given 21 county areas are going through LGR at the same time. The procurement process takes several weeks to undertake. By commencing the process now, this will enable the Council to appoint the necessary consultancy support to mobilise at pace following the Government's decision, while ensuring full compliance with procurement legislation and the Council's established governance arrangements. Appointment of the consultancy and entering into the necessary contractual arrangements will be subject to Cabinet approval. The contract is

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk

expected to start in October 2026 and run to September 2028. Its value is expected to be approximately £710,000 exclusive of VAT (approximately £850,000 including VAT). A break clause will be included in any contract at the point of election of the shadow authority for the new unitary and at the point of vesting, should it choose not to utilise the latter stages of the contract.

5. An open Invitation to Tender (ITT) procurement approach will be used where any interested supplier can bid for a contract. This will maximize competition, transparency, and innovation, while enforcing defensible and compliant purchasing decisions. Evaluation criteria will be published alongside the scope and detailed specification when the tender is issued.

Reasons for the decision

6. Project approval to initiate the procure a strategic partner, with delegated authority to the Transition Director to undertake the procurement will support timely and swift mobilisation following the Government's formal LGR decision.
7. This approach mitigated the risk of delay to programme delivery and ensures the Council is well-positioned to meet the Government's timeline for mobilisation and transition to a new authority that must vest on 1 April 2028.
8. Given the scale, complexity and compressed timescales associated with the design and implementation phase, existing officer capacity and capability alone would not be sufficient to meet the programme requirements without additional specialist support. The final decision on appointment of a preferred strategic partner will rest with Cabinet ahead of any contract being signed.

Alternative Options Considered

9. Another option considered would be to seek Cabinet approval for the appointment of a strategic partner first and then commence procurement. However, this would risk the procurement process not being able to start until late August, with onboarding of a strategic partner unlikely before late November. This would leave insufficient time to develop design options for the new Greater Oxford unitary authority to present to an incoming newly elected Shadow Authority in May 2027.
10. A further option considered would be not to procure a strategic partner and instead to recruit additional resource into the council to undertake the design and delivery work for the new unitary authority. With so many local authorities going through LGR at the same time the market for the types of specialist skills needed is extremely tight and officers are not confident that the recruitment would be successful. Recruitment on this scale would also likely create delays, leaving insufficient time to undertake the work required.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

11. This decision directly supports the successful delivery of LGR in Oxfordshire. It does not involve major or long-term commitments that could limit the choices of a future council. The decision will be managed within existing budgets and keeps flexibility for any future local government arrangements.

Equalities Impact

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk

12. The procurement will be conducted in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023 which integrates the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and broader Social Value requirements into core commercial decisions.
13. An initial equalities impact assessment has been included as part of this decision report, Appendix One. e. Full equality impact assessment considerations are expected to be addressed as part of the LGR programme design and implementation phase.

Risks

14. Failure to secure the right specialist support quickly posed a risk to programme delivery, timescales, and outcomes.

Implications of making the decision

Financial implications	The proposed procurement of consultancy services has an estimated value of £710,000 excluding VAT (approximately £850,000 including VAT), covering a 24 month period from autumn 2026. This is not a guaranteed level of expenditure. It is intended that break clauses are included within the contract to enable the new Greater Oxford Council post-vesting to review and terminate the contract if they wish to do so. A notional budget will reflect the anticipated expenditure across the length of the contract, which will be used to monitor the expenditure incurred as part of the programme management process. It is anticipated that there will be a need for a degree of flexibility within this budget profile in order to respond to the changing circumstances during the course of the programme. Funding is available within approved budgets and reserves, which are aligned with the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy. No financial commitment has been entered into at this point in time. Appointment of a contractor is conditional upon Cabinet approval.	Completed by: Alistair Rush, Group Finance Director Date: 09 July 2026
-------------------------------	--	--

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk

Legal implications	Project approval to initiate the procurement of a strategic partner for LGR is a key decision but at this value of contract is reserved to Cabinet to approve and is appropriately made on a single member basis in line with the constitution at part 3. Procurement of a contract with an estimated value of £850,000 (including VAT), exceeds the relevant financial threshold set under the Procurement Act 2023 and the subordinate regulations. As such, the Council must ensure that the procurement exercise is conducted in full compliance with the requirements of the Act and any associated regulations, including adherence to the principles of transparency, fair competition and value for money. The procurement must also be carried out in accordance with the Council's Contract Rules. The project team has worked closely with Legal Services and Procurement colleagues to develop an appropriate procurement strategy for this requirement. The proposed approach has been designed to ensure compliance with the Procurement Act 2023, the Procurement Regulations and the Council's Contract Rules, whilst also securing a competitive process capable of meeting the Council's operational and strategic requirements in relation to Local Government Reorganisation. The procurement documentation, evaluation methodology and governance arrangements will continue to be subject to legal oversight throughout the procurement process to ensure that the Council acts lawfully, transparently and in accordance with the principles of equal treatment and value for money.	Completed by: Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance and Strategy Date: 10 July 2026
----------------------------------	--	---

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk

	Following the procurement process any decision to enter into a contract with a preferred consultancy would constitute key decision under Part 4.5 of the Council's Constitution. Accordingly, it will require a decision by Cabinet. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, Inclusive Economic Growth and Culture is authorised under the Council's constitution and Local Government Act 2000 to delegate the exercise of executive functions to officers in order to undertake the procurement exercise. Such delegation enables timely and efficient delivery of the procurement while ensuring that appropriate governance, legal oversight and financial controls are maintained.	
Member declared interests	None	Completed by: Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance and Strategy Date: 10 July 2026

Background Documents
None

Report author	Mish Tullar
Job title	Transition Director
Service area or department	Chief Executive's Office
Email contact	mtullar@oxford.gov.uk

Consultee checklist

Consultees	Name and job title	Date
-------------------	---------------------------	-------------

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk

Chief Executive	Caroline Green	13.07.26
Group Finance Director	Alistair Rush	09.07.26
Director of Law, Governance and Strategy	Emma Jackman	10.07.26
Cabinet Member(s)	Susan Brown	13.07.26

Decision Maker Approval

<i>Name and job title</i>	<i>Date</i>
Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, Inclusive Economic Growth and Culture	13.07.26

This form must be completed and sent to Committee and Member Services **on the date that the decision maker signs it. This must be only done once all consultees have given their approval. The decision shall be effective from the date of publication; therefore, it is important that you send to Committee and Member Services as soon as it is completed and dated by the decision maker. Please note that it is not effective until it is published and the call in period has passed.**

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk

NOTES

The law¹ requires the Council to record executive and non-executive decisions taken by officers under delegated powers and to publish them on the Council's website.

These requirements apply to decisions that would have been taken by Council or the Cabinet if delegated powers had not been given to an officer:

- under an express delegation granted at a meeting of Cabinet, Council or a Committee.
- in accordance with Part 4.4 of the Constitution as follows:
 - Awarding a contract where authority has been specifically delegated to officers by Cabinet or a Cabinet Member (regardless of value)
 - Acquiring or disposing of freeholds or leaseholds granting new leaseholds (excluding assignments and rent reviews) where authority has been specifically delegated to officers by Cabinet or a Cabinet Member (regardless of value)
 - Making a regulatory order which affects a number of people, for example a Public Space Protection Order or a Parking Place Order
 - Where the effect of a decision is to grant a licence or permission or it affects the rights of citizens
 - Discharging any other express delegation from Cabinet or a Cabinet Member a committee or Council.

These requirements **do not** apply to:

- planning and licencing matters where there are established arrangements for recording decisions: or
- decisions which are purely administrative or operational in nature

All other officer decisions should be recorded on an officer decision form but do not need to be published. They must though be stored so as to ensure that they are not lost should an officer leave the authority.

Exempt or Confidential information

Information relating to a delegated officer or single member decision does not have to be made public if it is exempt or confidential. Summary information from this decision sheet (excluding all exempt or confidential information) will be published on the Council's website.

¹ the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012/2089 (Regulation 13(4)) and The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014/2095 (Regulation 7)

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk

Key or Non Key Decision

A key decision is an executive decision which is likely to:

- Have a significant effect on people living or working in a least two wards or
- Involve spending, income, or saving a significant amount – whether an amount is significant depends on the Council's total budget for the service involved. For this Council 'significant' in budgetary terms is:
 - Expenditure, income, or savings of £750,000 or greater in the context of the medium term financial strategy,
 - Acquiring or disposing of freeholds with a consideration over £500,000 in the context of the medium term financial strategy except for disposals pursuant to right to buy legislation
 - Acquiring or disposing of leaseholds where either the rental value is in excess of £250,000 per annum and/or the premium is £750,000 except for statutory lease renewals under Part 2 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 and disposals pursuant to right to buy legislation and disposals pursuant to right to buy legislation.
 - Acquiring or disposing of easements with a value over £750,000 and/or rental value over £250,000 each year

A key decision can only be taken and recorded here if notice of it has been published on the Forward Plan for at least 28 clear days. Key decisions taken by officers may be "called in" by any four councillors or the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee within two days of the notice of decision being published.

Please send the completed form to acforwardplan@oxford.gov.uk