

To: Cabinet
Date: 19 August 2026
Report of: Mish Tullar, Transition Director
Title of Report: Procurement of a strategic partner to support implementation of the Greater Oxford Council.

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	This report seeks Cabinet approval to procure a strategic partner for the design and implementation of a Greater Oxford Council, and working within an established systemwide LGR implementation governance framework. It also seeks to delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Group Finance Director and Monitoring Officer, to award and appoint the strategic partner consultancy support, except where there is an existing officer delegation within the Council's Constitution.
Key decision:	Yes. FORWARD PLAN ENTRY
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council
Corporate Priority:	The Council Strategy
Policy Framework:	The Governments English Devolution White Paper.

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	Note the update as to the progression of the procurement of a strategic partner for the design and implementation of the Greater Oxford Council.
2.	Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Group Finance Director and Monitoring Officer to award the contract.

Information Exempt From Publication

State in here what information is to be exempt from publication – where it is, attach it as an appendix and name the appendix as you describe It here	None
--	------

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix One	Appendix One: Risk Register	No
Appendix Two	Equality Impact Assessment	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. On 16 July 2026, the Government announced its decision as a 3 Councils model for its preferred model for LGR in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.
3. All councils in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire are working collaboratively in preparations for the transition to new unitary local authority structures.
4. It is expected that specialist consultancy support will be procured to support the systemwide 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.
5. As architect of the 3 Councils 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.
6. The contract is considered necessary to ensure smooth transition of LGR and therefore critical. There was 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 re going through LGR at the same time.

7. On 13 July 2026 a Single Member decision was taken to initiate the procurement process for a Strategic Partner, with the requirement that any contract award was subject to Cabinet approval ([Decision - Project approval to initiate procurement](#)).
8. Carrying out the procurement exercise early to be ready to swiftly appoint the necessary consultancy support enabled the Council to mobilise at pace following the Government's decision, while ensuring full compliance with procurement legislation and the Council's established governance arrangements. This approach mitigated the risk of delay to programme delivery and ensured the Council was well-positioned to meet the Government's timeline and mobilisation expectations.
9. An invitation to tender (ITT) was issued on 16 July with the deadline for submissions set at 13 August. Submissions are currently being evaluated by officers in accordance with the ITT and it is proposed the contract is awarded to the highest scoring bidder using the delegated authority sought.
10. By seeking delegated authority in advance and making an officer decision under that to award we will ensure that we can progress appointment swiftly to ensure that we are mobilised and have the specialist support in place to further the development of the Greater Oxford proposals for implementation.

Rationale for recommendations

11. Approval to appoint a Strategic Partner, with delegated authority to the Chief Executive, will support timely and swift mobilisation.
12. This approach mitigates the risk of delay to programme delivery and ensures the Council is well-positioned to meet the Government's timeline and mobilisation expectations.
13. Given the scale, complexity and compressed timescales associated with the design and implementation phase for Greater Oxford Council, existing officer capacity alone would not be sufficient to meet the programme requirements without additional specialist support.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

14. The decision allows an appointment needed to support ongoing service delivery and 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.
15. As yet, the specific value is unknown in the context of a future section 24 direction from government, however this will not be issued until after the Shadow Authority is elected in May 2027. The contract is considered necessary to ensure smooth transition of LGR and therefore critical.

Financial implications

16. The proposed procurement of consultancy services has an estimated value of up to approximately £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 does provide a level of contingency for underestimation of the contract value.

17. 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.
18. 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.
19. Funding is available within approved budgets and reserves, which are aligned with the Councils Medium Term Financial Plan.
20. No financial commitment has been entered into at this time. The financial commitment will arise upon appointment of a suitable contracted partner following the outcome of the proposed procurement process and subject to the delegated authority from Cabinet being sought in this report.

Legal issues

21. The proposed procurement of consultancy services, with an estimated value of up to approximately £710,000 excluding VAT (approximately £850,000 including VAT), exceeds the relevant financial threshold set under the Procurement Act 2023.
22. 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.
23. Given the value of the proposed contract, the decision constitutes a **key decision** under Part 4.5 of the Council's Constitution. Accordingly, it must be taken in accordance with the requirements for key decisions.
24. The Cabinet is authorised under the Council's Constitution and the Local Government Act 2000 to delegate the exercise of executive functions to officers in order to undertake the procurement exercise, award the contract and finalise and enter into the necessary contractual arrangements is lawful and appropriate. Such delegation enables timely and efficient delivery of the procurement while ensuring that appropriate governance, legal oversight and financial controls are maintained.
25. A further officer delegated decision will be required, with an entry on the forward plan should the proposed contract award be over the key decision threshold, 28 days in advance of the decision being taken.

Level of risk

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

27. See: Appendix One Risk Register.

Equalities impact

28. The procurement is being 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.
29. An initial Equalities Impact Assessment is shown as Appendix Two to this report.
30. Full Equality considerations are expected to be addressed as part of the programme design and implementation phase.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

31. There are no direct climate or environmental implications arising from the decision to delegate authority.
32. Relevant climate considerations would be reflected into programme delivery where appropriate.

Consultation

33. No formal consultation is required in relation to this decision.
34. Internal engagement has taken place with the Chief Executive, S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer; at the Leaders and Group Leaders meetings, with relevant senior and strategic officers, and through the Councils internal LGR Transition Board.

Report author	Mish Tullar
Job title	Transition Director
Service area or department	Chief Executive's Office
Telephone	07483 010 499
e-mail	mtullar@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK |
| 2 | A new future for local government in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire: 3 Councils |

This page is intentionally left blank