

# Cabinet Report



Report of Chief Executive

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Wards affected: All

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To: CABINET

Date: 6 March 2017

# Proposals for the future organisation of local government in Oxfordshire

## Recommendation(s)

To recommend Council to:

1. note and commend the approach taken by the Leaders of Vale, South Oxfordshire, and the County Council in putting the interests of residents, business and communities first in bringing forward these proposals;
2. consider the proposals, in particular taking note that 70 percent of those responding to the County Council's representative household survey supported the proposal for a new unitary council for Oxfordshire;
3. respond to the recent letter from the Secretary of State and submit proposals to Government subject to any amendments required provided that they are materially in accordance with the attached proposal;
4. delegate the power to make such amendments to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council;
5. ask officers to seek local support from key stakeholders and the wider public to promote the proposals to government and respond to any subsequent consultation undertaken by the Secretary of State;
6. support the further development of the Area Executive Board (AEB) model, a joint committee, open to all Districts and City Councils across Oxfordshire and the County Council, should be formed as early as possible. This joint committee should work with the existing County Council advisory group, local communities, Town and Parish Councils, and key delivery partners to develop detailed proposals that articulate the role, powers, format, scale and responsibilities of the AEBs which will be submitted to the Implementation Executive for inclusion with the proposed constitution of the new council;
7. to authorise the head of legal and democratic services to agree the terms of reference of the joint committee, which will include making recommendations regarding the initial functions of the implementation executive, and to make this council's appointments to the joint committee;
8. ask officers to take steps to establish the City Convention to work with residents and local stakeholders to design the new model of governance in Oxford;
9. in light of the above decisions, and the absence of unanimity among the current local authorities, confirm that Council does not support the proposals for a Mayor and Combined Authority as being the best structure for Oxfordshire.

## Purpose of Report

1. To update Cabinet on the Leaders of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils Joint Statement with Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, relating to the One Oxfordshire engagement proposals and the current position on negotiations regarding the One Oxfordshire discussion document. To receive the views of the Scrutiny Committee held on 27 February 2017. To make recommendations to Council on 8 March 2017 regarding the submission of the "A New Council for a Better Oxfordshire".

## Corporate Objectives

2. As stated in the 2016-20 Corporate Plan it is a strategic objective of the Council to pursue a proposal to seek a new structure of local government for Oxfordshire.
3. Achieving this objective could contribute to our other strategic objectives of delivering housing and infrastructure; supporting sustainable communities and wellbeing; building an even stronger economy and running an efficient council.

## Background

4. In 2016 the Council adopted a Corporate Plan which recognised the need for a new local government structure for Oxfordshire.
5. At its meeting on 7 October 2016 Cabinet considered a report which presented an independent study of Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) into options for local government reform in Oxfordshire. This study had been commissioned by the district councils in Oxfordshire, along with Oxford City Council. It also received information on a similar study undertaken by Grant Thornton on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council ("the County Council"). The report to Cabinet further set out relevant background to those studies having been commissioned by the respective authorities.
6. On 19 January 2017 the County Council published a discussion document, A Fresh Start for Oxfordshire: Proposals for a new Unitary Authority. This set out the County Council's thinking upon a single unitary authority for Oxfordshire ("One Oxfordshire").
7. The Council supports the principle of a unitary system as a means not just to save money but more importantly to improve services. Given the publication of the One Oxfordshire proposals, which the County Council intended to support the development of a proposal to be made to the Secretary of State, the logical conclusion was (and remains) to examine the merits of that proposal.
8. In consequence, on 6 February 2017 the Leaders of the Council, South Oxfordshire, and the County Council agreed a joint statement around improving key areas of One Oxfordshire. It records that the three Leaders had agreed to work together on a joint bid to government to create a better council for Oxfordshire. The joint statement is attached at Appendix A.
9. At its meeting on 15 February 2017 Council agreed the following motion:

"This Council supports the principle of a new countywide unitary council for Oxfordshire but recognises that the One Oxfordshire discussion document currently being publicised by Oxfordshire County Council requires strengthening in order to maximise the benefits to, and influence of, local communities and to satisfy the concerns of residents about some aspects of the proposal including the need for more local decision making. Council authorises the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to work with other partner councils to develop the terms of a proposal for local government change in Oxfordshire and present a detailed report to Council in due course".

10. As a result of this agreement in principle to join the County Council in submitting a bid to government, officers representing all three councils have worked together to address policy issues and improve the proposals, overseen by a 'Leaders Working Group' to which all council leaders in Oxfordshire were invited to seek to devise proposals which command support across both tiers of local government.
11. Under the current legislative framework, consensus amongst affected local authorities is not required in order for the Secretary of State to consider unitary proposals. Indeed, proposals may be made by only one authority within an area.

## **Options**

12. In 2016, the district and city council leaders outlined the possibility of a model with three or four unitary authorities across the county, working collectively through a combined authority. The October 2016 report to Cabinet gives further detail on those possible models. This is no longer the Council's preferred option for a number of reasons:
  - (a) There is a clear indication that the option of three unitary authorities is not financially viable and, on this basis, is likely to be rejected by government;
  - (b) Indications from Government departments that they would not endorse strategic safeguarding services being provided on a smaller scale;
  - (c) There is no longer a consensus across Oxfordshire districts over the scope of such unitary authorities, a combined authority and the potential role of a directly elected mayor;
  - (d) Strong indications, at least from the Local Government Association, that devolution in its previous funded form is not a realistic prospect.
13. The Government has not issued any recent guidance on the preparation of unitary submissions, although in speeches the Secretary of State has indicated that as a generalisation, a population size between 300,000 and 800,000 would be acceptable.
14. This report sets out how the proposals have been amended in light of public and stakeholder engagement undertaken by the County Council and through the joint work of the County Council, this Council, and South Oxfordshire. A full set of the proposal is attached at Appendix B.
15. A decision is now sought on whether to submit this proposal to the Secretary of State, subject to any required amendments.

## **Developing the Evidence Base and Agreeing the Preferred Option**

16. In May 2016 the County Council commissioned Grant Thornton to undertake a review of future options for local government in Oxfordshire – including maintaining the status quo. The County Council developed criteria for the review in consultation with local and national stakeholders and with regard to guidance issued in previous rounds of local government reorganisation, taking into account the changed political and economic agenda. The criteria were as follows:
  - Service Delivery and Outcomes: reforms should improve local service delivery and outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable;

- Cost Savings and Value For Money: reforms should deliver significant cost savings and drive value for money and long-term financial sustainability;
  - Stronger Leadership: reforms should provide stronger and more accountable strategic and local leadership;
  - Economic Growth and Infrastructure: reforms should drive economic growth and meet the infrastructure challenge, and,
  - Local Engagement and Empowerment: new structures should engage with communities and empower local areas
17. Grant Thornton undertook this work between May and August 2016. Their process included engagement with a range of key local stakeholders, and a public call for evidence. The terms of reference were agreed by an independent advisory group chaired by the Right Reverend Colin Fletcher, Bishop of Dorchester, and made up of stakeholders drawn from public, private and voluntary sectors who advised Grant Thornton on the review.
18. Grant Thornton's study was published in August 2016 and identified that a single unitary council covering the whole of Oxfordshire was most able to meet these criteria.
19. During the same period, Oxfordshire's five district and the City councils commissioned PwC to undertake a similar study. A summary of PwC's findings are contained in the October 2016 report to Cabinet. Their conclusion was that now is the time for a decision to be made on a new settlement for the structure and form of government, and governance, in Oxfordshire.
20. Both reports identified that a move to one or other form of unitary status would generate service improvements and deliver financial savings.
21. On 20 September 2016, the County Council's Cabinet received both of these reports along with a recommendation from its Performance Scrutiny Committee. It accepted the preferred option of a single unitary council and determined that officers should work with stakeholders, including the public, to develop proposals for the new authority. In particular it directed officers to further explore models to ensure that local areas within the new unitary authority could make decisions for their own area, within an overall budget and policy framework set at the strategic level.
22. Subsequently the Leader of the County Council committed to publishing a discussion document outlining draft proposals in order to facilitate to the fullest possible extent public and stakeholder engagement in their development.

## **Developing the discussion document**

23. In order to ensure that as wide as possible an audience was able to participate in the development of proposals, the County Council determined that a discussion paper should be published at the earliest possible point on a "white paper" basis, with the draft proposals set out to promote and frame a public and stakeholder conversation.

24. After setting out the case for change and the blueprint for the new authority, County Council officers structured a document using the criteria established for the Grant Thornton study, seeking to address how the proposed new model would meet the five criteria. A summary of relevant information about Oxfordshire and a summary of the options appraisal process were also included for context. The full independent reports from Grant Thornton and PwC were appended to the discussion document.

## **Public engagement**

25. The One Oxfordshire discussion document was published by the County Council on 12 January 2017 to inform an extensive public and stakeholder engagement exercise.
26. This process is now complete and a summary of engagement feedback is included within this report at Appendix C.
27. The process of public and stakeholder engagement was extensive, and included a random-sample, statistically-weighted, public opinion survey, an open online survey, and focus groups (conducted independently by Opinion Research Services Ltd), engagement sessions in libraries and markets, a further meeting of the Stakeholder Advisory Group and further meetings with government and other stakeholders.
28. This Council has not undertaken its own engagement exercise. Officers have concluded that it would not have added anything to the extensive one undertaken by the County Council and the duplication might, if anything, have caused confusion.

## **Working with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council**

29. As set out above, on 6 February 2017 a joint statement was issued by the leaders of Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council.
30. In this statement they set out that “Having looked at all the evidence, we are convinced that a single unitary council for Oxfordshire provides the best prospect for maintaining high quality services and securing badly needed investment in infrastructure”.
31. As a result of this, joint work has been undertaken around a number of themes and this is now reflected in the appended proposal. In particular there have been amendments from the discussion document proposals around the localism model to set out a proposal which commands support across both tiers of local government.
32. The City Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and Cherwell District Council have not been prepared to engage in developing a shared proposal, and have continued an active public relations campaign, both jointly and individually, against proposals to reform local government in Oxfordshire.

## **Outcomes of the Engagement Process**

33. The engagement process shows conflicting views.
34. The representative doorstep survey, provided by the independent company Opinion Research Services, showed 70% ( $\pm 5\%$  at a 95% level of confidence) of residents supported the proposals. This includes a majority of residents within each of the five district council areas.
35. This is in line with responses to the call for evidence conducted by Grant Thornton in 2016, which showed a majority believing that a single new unitary for Oxfordshire would be best able to meet the five criteria which were being assessed.
36. The open online questionnaire, open to all residents, in contrast, recorded strong disagreement with the proposals, particularly from Oxford City and West Oxfordshire, which made up a majority of the total responses.
37. The most likely explanation for this difference between the representative household survey and the open online questionnaire was the active campaign by Oxford City Council's leadership among staff, residents, and customers, directing them to complete the poll based on a range of questionable statements about the likely impact of One Oxfordshire, which may have generated unfounded fears for example regarding social housing and employment rights; West Oxfordshire District Council also posted a campaign document to all households asking them to oppose the proposals based on perceived risks to parking policy and council tax levels, and Cherwell District Council mounted an extensive social media campaign. Taken together the three districts are reported to have committed a total of £250,000 to this campaign.
38. Given the robust representative methodology behind the survey of households this is considered by officers to be the more reliable measure of genuine overall public opinion.
39. A majority of attendees supported the proposal at most of the deliberative workshops, but a number of different views were expressed.
40. Some of Oxfordshire's district councils also undertook public engagement work in opposition to the proposals. To date we are aware of an online survey for West Oxfordshire, and a petition established and promoted by Oxford City Council.

## **The revised proposals**

41. While the public engagement exercise showed general support for the draft One Oxfordshire proposals, there have been revisions based on detailed stakeholder and public feedback, and following our engagement with South Oxfordshire and the County Council.
42. A major element of feedback from the engagement exercise and from South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils concerned the proposed approach to localism. The discussion document proposed a localism model centred on five area executive boards based on the boundaries of current district councils. Strong feedback from both the public and key partners was that the advantages in

maintaining these boundaries – including continuity and existing identity – were outweighed by the fact that the five areas would be too large for genuine community governance that addressed local need.

43. Feedback suggested that most residents identify with groups of communities centred on Oxfordshire's thriving market towns, or in the case of Oxford, with the city and areas within the city - rather than with existing district council areas. Feedback also suggested that these boards need to work closely with local partners and take into account more closely partners' geographies– especially the NHS. Therefore the revised proposals describe a model that will operate at a more local level than was initially proposed.
44. Feedback was received that Oxford needs a governance model that provides decision making capacity separate, and complementary to the unitary council, that covers the community, environmental and civic issues that are best managed at the community level. The proposals therefore recommend that a new independent city council is established under the terms of Part Four of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This new local council would be designed to complement and enhance the strategic functions of the unitary council to replace the overlap and conflict inherent to the current two tier model.
45. Following the engagement, updates to the sections on Council Tax have been made, this now proposes that the impact of harmonisation is minimised by establishing the new council for Oxford with capacity for raising a substantial precept to cover the costs of its services directly, rather than via the new unitary authority. This will create the same governance structure across all areas of Oxfordshire which is not currently the case.
46. The planning section has been also been updated and includes clarity on the on-going status of Local Plans through the transition period and until the point that a revised planning framework is in place.
47. The role of the unitary authority in direct delivery and management of housing has been expanded to make it clear that the new council would be in a strong position to take an active role in promoting house building through its own actions, including by building housing directly both within and outside of the retained Housing Revenue Account to the benefit of residents of all areas of the county.
48. Advice from government officials has led to an updated transition section with a clearer indication of the likely process that would bring into being the new council.
49. Finally, the original title of "One Oxfordshire" has been renamed as "A New Council for a Better Oxfordshire". While at one level symbolic, this change does reflect feedback that "One Oxfordshire" does not sufficiently encompass the diversity and difference that these proposals should maintain and promote within a thriving new unitary authority.
50. Following submission of the revised proposals, the councils will need to continue to work together, for example the proposals for local executive boards and the arrangements for implementation and transition. Council is therefore asked to agree to the formation of a joint committee for this purpose.



## Devolution

51. There has been some concern expressed by the city and those district councils not supporting the principle of a single new unitary that the unitary proposals prevent Oxfordshire from pursuing proposals for devolution of powers and funding from central government: This is not the case. There are a number of points to note in this regard.
52. The first is that government officials have explicitly stated that proposals to reform local government and proposals for devolution are not in competition, in fact making local government simpler and more efficient could be a significant spur to a devolution deal.
53. This is consistent with statements made on overcoming the challenges for delivering infrastructure, growth and productivity, for example in the National Infrastructure Commission's interim report into the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford corridor which recognised that governance should be strengthened across the area, potentially through the creation of new unitary authorities.
54. Secondly, the momentum around devolution other than in areas already agreed has significantly reduced, with civil servants emphasising that their priority is the delivery of deals already agreed, notably those cities with mayoral elections in May 2017.
55. Therefore, there is a strong case to be made for focusing on unitary proposals for improving local government - because this both releases funding and delivers improvements to the process for delivering infrastructure and growth, and because this structure will put Oxfordshire in a stronger position to make a compelling proposal for devolution in the next round. Similar proposals are being progressed in other counties, with the most advanced being Buckinghamshire and Dorset.
56. Joint work between the city, district and county councils has developed much of the substantive content for a deal with government on infrastructure delivery, housing and the skills agenda. However, councils have not been able to agree on what would constitute an effective governance model – there is consensus on what we need and want from Government. However, councils have not been able to agree on what would constitute an effective governance model.
57. A single unitary council would provide the strong platform for a future deal required by government, with robust and accountable leadership in place and the ability to support borrowing and coordinate infrastructure, planning and housing, without the need for a costly additional tier of government to be inserted on top of an already confused and conflicted system.
58. It is therefore logical that the existing strong suite of devolution proposals on infrastructure, skills and housing delivery are taken forward for discussion with government during the transition period to a new council – but accompanied by a much simpler governance model with the unitary council as its foundation, that strengthens clear strategic and local decision-making, rather than adding a further layer of combined authority governance.

59. In contrast a Mayoral Combined Authority would add an additional tier of administrative complexity and cost to the governance of Oxfordshire, without guaranteeing any devolution would be delivered. Proposals to date continue to enshrine subsidiarity which raises doubt that a mayor could direct strategic priorities as needed, or provide the confidence required to commit to the risk of borrowing and investment in strategic infrastructure to unlock growth. Asking government to bridge the financial gap without any contribution to this having been made by local government in Oxfordshire would represent a return to the 'begging bowl' principle, rather than the 'deal-making' principle.
60. In addition there has yet to be a Combined Authority of this kind agreed by government covering only a single upper tier county area (the most similar Combined Authority area to Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, includes the neighbouring unitary authority of Peterborough).
61. The proposal for local government reform is easier to achieve, as legislation sets out that the introduction of regulations for reorganising local councils require only one relevant council to consent, whereas government have been clear that they will not accept Combined Authority proposals which do not command consensus - something which has led to the collapse of devolution proposals in the North East, Lincolnshire, Hampshire, Suffolk, and it appears also now in Lancashire.
62. The “A New Council for a Better Oxfordshire” proposal includes plans for a devolution deal which will seek to deliver:
- A new £1bn rolling infrastructure investment fund;
  - Transformation of skills improvements and investment to meet Oxfordshire’s growth needs;
  - A new strategic local plan which takes a long term view on meeting the needs of Oxfordshire, supporting sustainable growth that meets that need through better infrastructure and service integration.
63. In light of these issues Cabinet is being asked to make clear their position on the proposal for a Mayor and Combined Authority for Oxfordshire.

## **Financial Implications**

64. The immediate financial implications are minor. The long-term financial implications are expected to be average savings of around £20million a year over five years should the government agree to implement the proposal, with one-off transition costs of around £16million.

## **Legal Implications**

65. The procedure for the creation of a unitary authority is set out in Sections 1-7 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as now to be read with section 15 Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. Under this procedure, the Secretary of State can ‘invite’ a proposal. In making any such proposal, the proposing authority or authorities must have regard to any guidance from the Secretary of State as to what a proposal should seek to achieve and the matters that should be taken into account in formulating a proposal (Section 3(4)). The most recent guidance formally issued by the Secretary of State was *Invitation*

*to councils in England to make proposals for future unitary structures* published in 2006 and before the passing of the 2007 Act. The Department of Communities and Local Government has also actively engaged in conversations and correspondence much more recently with various local authorities about potential submissions under the statutory procedure, including this Council and Dorset and Buckinghamshire County Councils.

66. At its meeting on 15 February 2017, Council determined that full Council should itself take the decision whether to adopt or approve any proposals for unitary local government for Oxfordshire (including submitting the same to the Secretary of State and all further decisions following the Secretary of State's response), having considered recommendations of the Cabinet.
67. Once a submission is received by the Secretary of State, the procedures under the 2007 Act say that the Secretary of State may seek the advice of the Local Government Boundary Commission on any matter relating to the proposal. The procedures also *require* that the Secretary of State may not make an order implementing a proposal unless he/she has consulted every local authority and such other persons as he considers appropriate. It is for the Secretary of State to determine whether it is applicable or not, in the present case, that Section 15 of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 allows him/her to 'fast track' any of the processes under Section 1-7 of the 2007 Act.
68. In preparing the revised proposals, regard has been had to previous guidance from the Secretary of State. Other considerations, after the formal making of the proposals, are for the Secretary of State to determine as, of course, is the final decision on whether to implement them.

## **Staff Implications**

69. Continued work on the proposals and working with government in support of a positive decision will mainly require in-house officer time. Further implications will be assessed if the proposal is successful.

## **Equalities Implications**

70. Oxfordshire County Council undertook a service and community impact assessment for these proposals and is appended as Appendix D. This is a high level assessment. It is reasonable to say that the potential equality issues and benefits highlighted within the assessment apply equally to this Council.
71. The assessment articulates the impact of this proposal on those groups with protected characteristics which Council will need to consider in detail. In the main, any perceived adverse impact can be mitigated and indeed considerable benefit for those groups can be realised under this proposal.

### **Benefits include:**

- Bringing together key functions currently delivered across different councils will improve outcomes for people and communities, particularly those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.
- Creating a single organisation would also make contacting the council simpler through a single point of contact.

- Local area executive boards ensuring that the specific needs and issues in different areas are understood and responded to appropriately.

**Potential equality issues include:**

- The potential for rationalisation of buildings to negatively impact people's ability to access services.
- Transition to new council may impact on service delivery if not carefully managed.
- Changing boundaries and consolidation of some existing local services in creating a new council could change geographical and eligibility boundaries for some services.
- Potential redundancy, pay or relocation implications for staff, based on uncertainty caused by proposing to abolish the existing councils in Oxfordshire.

72. It should be noted that mitigating action has been included within the assessment to take account of these issues. However, as detailed proposals are developed, the Councils will need to continue to assess the impact any changes will have on our residents and staff who share protected characteristics at appropriate times / stages. It may be appropriate to do this jointly with Oxfordshire County Council.

## **Other implications**

73. The Council is committed to open and honest communication with residents and therefore officers will seek local support from key stakeholders and engage with the wider public to promote the proposals to government.

## **Conclusion**

74. Cabinet is asked to consider and make recommendations to Council on the "A New Council for a Better Oxfordshire" proposal.

75. Cabinet is also asked to recommend Council request officers to submit these proposals to the Secretary of State subject to any minor amendments required, delegate the power to make such amendments to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and with South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, and to seek local support from key stakeholders and the wider public to promote the proposals to government. Cabinet is also asked to recommend Council to agree to establish a joint committee with all the other Oxfordshire Councils to develop the proposals for the executive boards and the implementation executive and to authorise the head of legal and democratic services to agree the terms of reference of the joint committee and to make this council's appointments to it.

## Background Papers

- A Fresh Start for Oxfordshire: Proposals for a new Unitary Council - A document for discussion. Published by Oxfordshire County Council, January 2017  
<http://www.oneoxfordshire.org/our-vision>
- Report undertaken by PwC  
<http://democratic.southoxon.gov.uk/documents/s9998/Appendix%201%20-%20PwC%20Review%20of%20proposed%20Unitary%20Authority.pdf>
- Report undertaken by Grant Thornton  
[http://media.wix.com/ugd/8b028f\\_e7f54796ef5f4199ad0246e7bacdd1ea.pdf](http://media.wix.com/ugd/8b028f_e7f54796ef5f4199ad0246e7bacdd1ea.pdf)

# Appendix A

## **Council leaders' statement on single unitary council for Oxfordshire**

Becoming a single unitary council will transform the way we deliver our services to the people of Oxfordshire for the better. But these are vital services that will impact on everyone. That's why the changes we make must without fail improve the quality of life for residents, their families and the communities they live in.

We have heard a range of differing views on how these services should be organised and between us, as the leaders of our councils, we have come together with others to make this happen. It has been an incredible journey that has ultimately brought us all together in one place. The statement below sets out our aims for a single unitary council and how we are working together on a joint proposal to government.

- The leaders of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse councils have agreed to work together with Oxfordshire County Council on a joint bid to government to create a better council for Oxfordshire.
- There is now a strong consensus that in the context of reduced government funding and urgent need for capital investment, a step-change is needed in the way council services are run.
- Having looked at all the evidence, we are convinced that a single unitary council for Oxfordshire provides the best prospect for maintaining high quality services and securing badly needed investment in infrastructure.
- It is also essential that the new unitary council must protect the quality of life for everyone in Oxfordshire, in both urban and rural areas.
- All are agreed that enhancing local democracy and autonomy should be at the heart of the new model for local government, so that different areas can continue to make decisions that work for them. There can be no one-size-fits-all approach.
- The joint unitary bid will build on the foundation laid by the draft One Oxfordshire proposal, with significant improvements to ensure that the priorities of local communities, raised by district council partners, are fully addressed.

Over the coming weeks we will be focusing particularly on:

- Strengthening the model of local accountability, with decisions taken at a much more local level than offered by the area executive board model.
- Ensuring locally held reserves are used for the benefit of local residents, while recognising the collective benefits of pooling resources to leverage investment.
- Commitment to a revised model of council tax harmonisation across the county over a reasonable period of time.
- Ensuring that the planning framework builds on existing and emerging local plans.
- Establishing a housing company to ensure delivery of sustainable housing and infrastructure.
- It is essential that the model of local government incorporates the very different social and economic make-up of Oxford city and its vitally important economic importance to the whole county.
- We acknowledge that this is a complex issue to resolve and urge the city council to join the working group so that we can draw on their knowledge and expertise of running services in the city to develop a model of local governance that works for Oxford.

- The final proposal will also take full account of the comments and issues raised by residents and stakeholders during the One Oxfordshire public engagement exercise currently being carried out by the county council.
- We note that the 'more local' aspect of the proposal is proving to be of particular interest to residents. They also want reassurance that any change would focus on service improvement through joining up, as well as making savings.
- All councils must be involved in creating the new unitary authority and deciding upon the transition arrangements, with councillors for the county and districts working together to take key decisions, including appointment of an interim chief executive at an early stage of the process.
- Having agreed on the best approach to improving services and securing the infrastructure needed to ensure sustainable economic growth, we plan to jointly submit a bid to the Secretary of State in March. We want a quick decision so the new authority can be created as soon as possible.
- The next step is to form a working group of all the partner councils to develop a new proposal that represents the best deal for the people of Oxfordshire. We hope all the councils will be involved, and will also be asking our business and public sector partners for their input.

Cllr Ian Hudspeth

Cllr Matthew Barber

Cllr John Cotton