



**Cherwell**

DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

21 March 2025

Jim McMahon OBE MP  
Minister of State (Minister for Local Government and English Devolution)  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Minister

On behalf of the Cherwell District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council Executives, we are writing to confirm our support for establishing two unitary councils for the whole of the Oxfordshire and West Berkshire area.

It has become clear to us that there are two options that merit consideration. A single unitary council covering the whole of the Oxfordshire area is a feasible solution, and we expect the potential benefits and drawbacks to be evidenced in the proposal to be developed. But we believe that two unitary councils provide a compelling and credible option for sustainable and beneficial local government reform across the broader area.

The Oxfordshire councils have submitted a joint interim plan, by the 21st March 2025 deadline, which sets out the three proposals that are currently being discussed. We have worked closely with officers and members from the relevant principal councils, in line with your letter of 5th February 2025. We fully understand the importance of collaborative working and will continue with this endeavour as proposals develop further.

We believe there are six key benefits of the emerging two unitary council approach:

**Right Size:** With 2023 populations of over 450,000, each of the two new unitary councils would be rapidly approaching or passing the 500,000 guidance by vesting day, offering the benefits of increased capacity, resilience and efficiency without the risks involved in councils that are too large.

**Enables Stronger Communities:** One of the benefits of councils of a manageable size is their ability to forge closer and more meaningful relationships with their distinct localities, places and communities, fostering democratic accountability and community connection. Whilst the exact model that the two unitary council will adopt to foster these relationships has yet to be developed, we believe that a sensible size provides an immediate advantage.

**Rapid Service Improvements:** A key aim of LGR is to provide high quality and sustainable public services. Whilst this should be achievable through any model, the councils combining in the two unitary councils have a significant head start based on existing collaborative working and shared services. This will mean that citizens will see the benefits of improved services quicker than if other options are adopted.

**Minimises the Disaggregation of Key Services:** This proposal minimises risks around the one-off and ongoing costs and disruption of the disaggregation of services such as adult social care, children's, education and SEND. This is because each of the two new councils will have the opportunity to build around existing upper tier services currently provided by Oxfordshire County and West Berkshire Councils and will avoid having to create an entirely new set of services.

**Significant Efficiencies:** Whilst detailed modelling has yet to be undertaken, using the PwC approach to considering benefits is likely to show that the two unitary approach will create very similar efficiencies as to those provided by the one unitary option. This is driven by the fact that the inclusion of West Berkshire means that higher overall benefits are possible and there are no additional costs of running two sets of upper tier services, as they both already exist.

**Drives Devolution:** The areas of Oxford City, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell constitute a unique and distinctive set of strengths and opportunities in driving growth that complement the areas of South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Berkshire. The two unitary councils will have the benefit of providing strong and coherent voices for these two distinct areas within a devolution context and will give an excellent platform for driving growth across the broader area.

We are continuing to gather evidence in preparing the case and that fully represents the best interests of our residents in a timely manner.

We are committed to finding the best approach to local government reform across Oxfordshire and surrounding areas and will continue to work towards achieving the goals set out in the White Paper with colleagues. We look forward to hearing initial feedback from you or from your officials.

Yours sincerely



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