

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the

**Executive**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB  
on **Wednesday, 19 March 2025** at the rising of Council

PRESENT

Councillors: Andy Graham, Duncan Enright, Lidia Arciszewska, Rachel Crouch, Andrew Prosser, Geoff Saul, Alaric Smith and Tim Sumner

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Madhu Richards (Director of Finance), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer) and Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Councillors in attendance: Jane Doughty, Genny Early, Roger Faulkner, Liz Leffman, Dan Levy, Paul Marsh, Elizabeth Poskitt and Sarah Veasey

**317 Apologies for Absence.**

Apologies were received from Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning.

**318 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**319 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

As the meeting of the Executive on 12 March 2025 took place after the publication date for the agenda there were no minutes to consider.

**320 Receipt of Announcements**

There were no announcements made by Executive Members.

**321 Participation of the Public**

There was no public participation.

**322 Reports from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

There had been no meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee since the last meeting of the Executive and therefore no reports from the Committee for consideration.

**323 Matters raised by Audit and Governance Committee**

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There had been no meeting of the Audit and Governance Committee since the last meeting of the Executive and therefore no matters were raised.

### **324 Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation - Initial Options**

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council introduced the item. Councillor Graham stated that the purpose of the item was to provide an overview of the interim plan and each of the options for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Oxfordshire, prior to submission to the Government on 21 March 2025. Government would then share feedback to councils and would expect submission of final proposals no later than 28 November 2025.

Councillor Graham advised that the Council had been working within a tight timescale on the agreed submission and was pleased with the co-operative way in which all Oxfordshire councils had worked.

Councillor Graham went on to introduce the three initial options for LGR that have been agreed by Oxfordshire councils and formed the submission to Government as follows:

- A single unitary Council – Oxfordshire Council.
- Two unitary Councils – Oxford City, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell Council and Ridgeway Council (derived from existing boundaries of South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Berkshire Council)
- Three unitary Councils – Greater Oxford City Council, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell Council and Ridgeway Council.

Councillor Graham stated that the proposed options and representative letters that would outline the options were to be agreed and noted by Members of Oxfordshire councils at the relevant councils' Executive meetings that day and at County Cabinet on 20 March 2025 to provide a commonality of approach across Oxfordshire.

Councillor Graham stated that in addition to the agreed overarching letter of options, each council would be sending an accompanying letter in which they would take the lead on one of the options. West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Council would jointly be leading on the two-unitary model. Councillor Graham noted that West Oxfordshire District Council's individual response letter acknowledged the alternative options on which other Oxfordshire councils were taking the lead.

Councillor Graham advised that following a response from the Government the Council would begin to investigate the data around the option suggested in the feedback, and continue to work with partners, to work towards a final proposal. Councillor Graham advised that, following the Government feedback the Executive would continue to be transparent with Members. The Executive would create a Cross-party Working Group in the new civic year to

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work towards planning LGR. Regular LGR briefings to Council would also continue to allow Members to have their views heard.

Councillor Graham concluded that Government would be expecting a final proposal by 28 November 2025. The Executive would be guided by Officers and Members in generating the proposal to ensure compliance with guidelines. Ultimately the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government would make the final decision on LGR and there remained a great deal of uncertainty.

In discussing the item, other members of the Executive congratulated Councillor Graham and Officers on the work, considering tight timescales. It was noted that the current proposals and options could be amended based on Government feedback and the work in creating other options. It was noted that the Council was not precluded from putting forward other options in final submissions if a more favourable option became available. It was noted that services would continue in the period of LGR, and the Council would work with partners to ensure that residents continued to receive good services. Where economies of scale provided opportunities for more cost-effective services this would also be explored. It was acknowledged that, within LGR, the identity and sense of place of residents and local democracy would need to be protected.

Councillor Andy Graham, the Leader of the Council, proposed accepting the recommendations.

The proposal was agreed unanimously by the Executive.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive:

1. Note the receipt of the statutory invitation received from the Minister of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government on 5 February 2025;
2. Note the interim plan update as set out in Appendix 1 and the emerging options for local government reorganisation set out in the Appendices 2-4;
3. Note that the Leader of the Council with the support of Officers will write to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution to outline the Council's commitment to working collaboratively with other Oxfordshire Partners on LGR and Devolution options and to set out the initial views from the Executive.

The Meeting closed at 3.48 pm

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CHAIR