

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 12 November 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Coles (Chair), Carl Rylett (Vice-Chair), Elizabeth Poskitt, Lidia Arciszewska, Hugo Ashton, Andrew Beaney, Michael Brooker, Julian Cooper, Sandra Cosier, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Genny Early, Duncan Enright, Roger Faulkner, Andy Goodwin, Andy Graham, Natalie King, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Andrew Prosser, Nigel Ridpath, Geoff Saul, Sandra Simpson, Alaric Smith, Ruth Smith, Tim Sumner, Sarah Veasey, Mark Walker, Alex Wilson and Alistair Wray

Officers:

Other Councillors in attendance:

CL.47 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Joy Aitman, Thomas Ashby, Adam Clements, David Cooper, Jane Doughty, David Jackson, Ed James, Liz Leffman, Martin McBride, Liam Walker and Adrian Walsh.

CL.48 Declarations of Interest

The Chair informed members that the Council's Monitoring Officer had provided the following advice:

In relation to 'double-hatted' members who also sit on Oxfordshire County Council or Town and Parish Councils, the Monitoring Officer advised that if members had already expressed a view on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals they could take part in the debate so long as they approached it with an open mind. Additionally, if a member had already declared their membership of another local authority in their register of interest, they did not need to make the declaration again at this meeting.

Declarations of Interest were received as follows:

Councillor Dan Levy explained that as well as being an Oxfordshire County Councillor, he was a Cabinet Member at that authority.

Councillor Michael Brooker explained that he was an employee of Oxfordshire County Council in its Fire and Rescue Service.

CL.49 Participation of the Public

There was no public participation.

CL.50 Local Government Reorganisation

The Chair introduced the item and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to consider and debate the three proposals for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire. The Chair explained that the comments made would be captured and fed back to the Executive the following day.

The Director of Place, alongside the Head of Communications and Corporate Strategy, presented slides on devolution proposals. They presented each proposal based the original government criteria.

Members then debated each proposal, highlighting the following comments under each proposal.

One Unitary Authority Proposal

- Considered to be based on prestige.
- Was seen to pose more questions than provided answers – more so than the alternative proposals.
- There were concerns that District Councils would effectively be absorbed by the County Council.
- The timeline for producing a county-wide local plan within one year was considered unrealistic.
- Concerns were highlighted over local representation because Councillors would represent a very high number of electors.
- Similar proposals had been considered and rejected previously.

Two Unitary Authority Proposal

- Was considered low risk, high resilience and provided value for money.
- There was concern about urban interests overriding rural interests in Oxford and Shires.
- It was stated that the City would bring opportunities, assets and influence to Oxford and Shires e.g. potential improvements to the A40, trading company, housing company, housing revenue account, acceleration of affordable housing delivery.
- There was an opportunity to build on what worked well at the different councils and improve services.
- Districts understood town and parish councils and how to progress those relationships.

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- The proposals would be better for growth and development e.g. in areas like Carterton.
- Had costs but minimised disruption to services which was considered more important.
- Oxford and Shires had a good balance of urban areas, towns, villages and rural areas; bringing different communities together.
- Right size to protect and improve services to residents.
- Supported by multiple authorities and built on close partnership working.
- Fewer unanswered questions than alternative proposals.
- Better of the three options.

Three Unitary Authority Proposal

- There was a risk to the green belt.
- The proposals were deemed Oxford-centric in nature.
- The proposed growth was considered unbalanced and unrealistic.

The Leader proposed accepting the recommendations in the report. In summing up he stated he was happy that there was broad agreement in the Chamber. He stated the two unitary proposal would bring an end to working in “silos”, and allow smaller authorities to be able to compete with larger ones. He also welcomed that rural communities and urban ones would be brought together by the proposals and highlighted that the Government should consider their approach to consultation to ensure it would be meaningful.

Councillor Duncan Enright seconded the proposal to accept the recommendations, thanking the officers for their work. Councillor Enright stated that the two unitary proposal respected the existing structure, and that the One Oxfordshire proposal had been considered and not put in place in the past. He also highlighted that Town and Parish Councils would be crucial and that it was important to work with them.

The recommendations were put to a vote.

Voting record - For 35, Against 0, Abstentions 1

RESOLVED that Council:

1. Noted that since the statutory invitation to all councils in two tier areas, significant work has been undertaken by all Oxfordshire Councils and that West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils' officers have engaged with officers across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

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2. Agreed to present views to the Executive on the submission of a full proposal for a two unitary model based on one new unitary council covering the entire existing boundaries of West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils and Oxford City Council, with a working title of 'Oxford & Shires' and a second new unitary covering the entire existing boundaries of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and West Berkshire Council, with the working title of 'Ridgeway'.
3. Noted that two other proposals will be submitted, one proposed by Oxfordshire County Council covering the Oxfordshire area and one from Oxford City Council covering the Oxfordshire and West Berkshire area.
4. Noted that Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council will jointly submit the full proposal directly to Government in line with the Oxfordshire invitation letter.

The Meeting closed at 3.10 pm

CHAIR