



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 11 MARCH 2026.
Subject	LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION STATUTORY CONSULTATION
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Leader of the Council: Councillor Andy Graham Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Chief Executive Officer, Giles Hughes Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Astrid Harvey, Senior Policy Adviser – LGR and Devolution Email: astrid.harvey@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	<p>To seek delegated authority for the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to submit a response to the Government's statutory consultation on the three proposed options submitted for Local Government Reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- One Unitary Council covering the whole area of Oxfordshire- Two Unitary Councils: Oxford and Shires (comprising current areas of Cherwell District, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire District) and Ridgeway (comprising current areas of South Oxfordshire District, Vale of White Horse District and West Berkshire)- Three Unitary Councils which includes a request to split existing district council areas between the three proposed new councils comprising the current areas of: Greater Oxford Council (Oxford City plus 15 parishes from Cherwell, 25 parishes from South Oxfordshire and 9 parishes from Vale of White Horse), Northern Oxfordshire Council (Cherwell less 15 parishes and West Oxfordshire), and Ridgeway Council (South Oxfordshire less 25 parishes, Vale of White Horse less 9 parishes, plus West Berkshire)
Annexes	None

Recommendation(s)	<p>That the Executive resolves to:</p> <p>I. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to submit a response to the Government’s statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council.</p>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>In response to government’s request to promote the statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, the Council, alongside other affected authorities, has run a comprehensive campaign to encourage informed participation.</p> <p>An extensive engagement programme has invited meetings with government’s named consultees along with local stakeholder engagement (Town and Parish Councils, local businesses and community groups), a Town and Parish Forum and drop-in sessions in Witney and Chipping Norton.</p>

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** In response to the Secretary of State's invitation to councils in Oxfordshire to submit proposals for unitary local government for Oxfordshire, three proposals for local government reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire were submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 28 November 2025.
- 1.2** MHCLG is now seeking views on the proposals received through a statutory consultation which runs from 5 February 2026 to 26 March 2026.
- 1.3** West Oxfordshire District Council is a named consultee for the purposes of this statutory consultation and therefore is invited to submit a response on the following proposals for unitary local government for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire:

One Unitary Council covering the whole area of Oxfordshire

Two Unitary Councils: Oxford and Shires (comprising current areas of Cherwell District, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire District) and Ridgeway (comprising current areas of South Oxfordshire District, Vale of White Horse District and West Berkshire)

Three Unitary Councils which includes a request to split existing district council areas between the proposed new councils comprising the current areas of: Greater Oxford Council (Oxford City plus 15 parishes from Cherwell, 25 parishes from South Oxfordshire and 9 parishes from Vale of White Horse), Northern Oxfordshire Council (Cherwell less 15 parishes and West Oxfordshire), and Ridgeway Council (South Oxfordshire less 25 parishes, Vale of White Horse less 9 parishes, plus West Berkshire)

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Council unanimously voted on 12 November 2025 (35 for, 0 against and 1 abstention) in support of 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 council 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'.
- 2.2** Executive subsequently unanimously approved submission of the full proposal for a two unitary model and this was submitted to government on 28 November 2025.
- 2.3** MHCLG has commenced a 7 week consultation on the three proposals submitted for Oxfordshire, to close on 26 March 2026. The Council is a named consultee invited to submit a response to the consultation.
- 2.4** Consistent with the decisions by Council and Executive in November 2026, a response will be submitted in support of the two unitary model and in response to the two alternative

proposals submitted for Local Government Reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

3. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

3.1 MHCLG has also requested the Council promote the statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. The Council, alongside other affected authorities, has run a comprehensive campaign to encourage informed participation with a defined list of named consultees through invited discussions about the proposals under consultation.

3.2 An extensive engagement programme has promoted the consultation across a range of platforms. Local stakeholder engagement has encouraged responses from local businesses and community groups through drop-in sessions in Witney and Chipping Norton and a focussed Town and Parish Forum has supported the participation of Town and Parish Councils in the consultation.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1 The Executive could decide not to submit a consultation response to the statutory consultation for Local Government Reorganisation in Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire.

4.2 To do so would be inconsistent with the formal decisions taken in November 2025 to support and submit the proposal for a two unitary model for Local Government Reorganisation in response to the Secretary of State's formal invitation to do so.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Although there is no legal obligation for the Council as a named consultee to respond to this consultation it presents a further opportunity for the Council to influence a decision of significant local effect.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1 Should the Executive decide not to submit a consultation response to the statutory consultation as a named consultee it would risk the Council's ability to influence the government's decision making process on Local Government Reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. This would be inconsistent with the unanimous decision at Full Council and Executive in November 2025 to support the submission of a two unitary model for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire through the government's Local Government Reorganisation programme.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 The statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation is conducted by Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government who are also the body responsible for risk

assessment of the consultation. They state on the consultation portal that ‘An impact assessment has not been prepared for this consultation as it will only affect local government in Oxfordshire and so there will be no direct regulatory, economic or social impacts.’

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The submission of a response to the statutory consultation on Local Government Reorganisation for Oxfordshire and West Oxfordshire does not in itself have a climate impact.
- 9.2 The role of the proposed two unitary model submitted and subject to the consultation has had due regard for enabling future structures for Local Government to continue taking effective action towards the climate and ecological emergency once implemented.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None

(END)