



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	FULL COUNCIL – 20 MAY 2026
Subject	STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP UPDATE
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Andy Graham - Leader of the Council Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Mark Pritchard – Head of Communications and Corporate Strategy Email: mark.pritchard@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To enable the Leader to provide an update to Council on his portfolio responsibility for Strategic Partnerships
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	That the Council resolves to: I. Note the contents of the Strategic Partnerships Report
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/	None

Consultation	
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1** West Oxfordshire District Council recognises that for the Council to deliver on its aspirations it is essential to work collaboratively with others. Strategic partnerships provide opportunities to tackle issues of common interest, share best practice, and provide a strong voice into to Government and other organisations that have an influence over our district.
- 1.2** The Leader of the Council, Councillor Andy Graham, is the Executive Member responsible for strategic partnerships including Oxfordshire Joint Leaders Committee, South East Councils, Local Councils Network (previously District Councils Network) Publica and Ubico.
- 1.3** Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was announced in November 2024 as part of the English Devolution White Paper which set out the intention to reorganise two-tier areas of local government into unitary authorities across England. This significant shift in the way local government operates, both nationally and locally, has had impact across our strategic partnerships with many having to review how they operate.

2. LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Oxfordshire Leader's Joint Committee

- 2.1** The Oxfordshire Leader's Joint Committee (OLJC) is made up of the leaders of the six local councils in Oxfordshire. It exists to deliver the aims of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire, that have been adopted by all six partner councils. It does this by overseeing the delivery of projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to deliver collaboratively in the fields of economic development and strategic planning.
- 2.2** The Joint Committee meets six times each year to discuss issues facing Oxfordshire's future, most often in a non-decision-making capacity. West Oxfordshire District Council has long been a member of the committee and as Leader of the Council Cllr Andy Graham represents West Oxfordshire's interests at this strategic level. He also serves as the vice-chair of the committee.
- 2.3** The Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy (OxIS) is a key strategic aim of the OLJC looking ahead to the infrastructure needs of the council to 2050. The OxIS is important to enable Oxfordshire can meet the needs of growing communities, support climate action and environmental recovery, attract and coordinate investment, deliver high-quality joined-up services. The Stage 2 Project Prioritisation Report Consultation was delivered in March 2026. A final draft of the strategy being presented to the committee in April 2026.
- 2.4** Another strategic priority of the OLJC is to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. Phase I of the Oxfordshire Local Area Energy Plan is now complete, providing a countywide evidence base for the transition to net zero, including baseline analysis, stakeholder engagement, and countywide energy modelling. Work is underway on a West Oxfordshire-specific energy plan, focusing on local priorities and stakeholder input. In addition, the Committee continues to oversee the roll out of electric

vehicle charging infrastructure and works closely with the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership.

Local Government Association, Local Council Network and South East Councils

- 2.5** The Local Government Association is the national membership body for all local authorities across England and serves to strengthen local government. West Oxfordshire District Council is a member along with 314 other English Councils. As a member the LGA provides training and support and lobbies on behalf of the sector along with other services. The Leader of the Council attended this year's Annual Conference to engage with peers alongside putting forward West Oxfordshire District Council as a member council in strategic discussions regarding local government.
- 2.6** The Local Councils Network (formerly the District Council Network) is a cross-party network providing a single national voice for member council. The network is made up of 169 councils including West Oxfordshire District Council. It is a special interest group of the Local Government Association that provides a single voice for all District services. The Leader of the Council is a member of the Executive Member Board and advocates on behalf of West Oxfordshire and District Council's more widely at a national level.
- 2.7** South East Councils is a cross-party membership association which represents the views of local authorities in the South East region. With most local authorities in the South East as members, the partnership seeks to provide a unified democratic voice on South East interests with elected representatives actively assisting in making the case on priority issues to, and through, Government, Parliament, Industry, and the media. It is endeavouring to promote and maintain the South East's position as a leading global economy, seeking fairer funding for the region, and monitoring and highlighting its economic profile. The organisation is currently analysing how LGR will impact it moving forward and will consider how it can best represent the voice of local government in the South East and maximise its sphere of influence. The Leader of the Council is a member of the Executive Forum for South East Councils and plays a role in helping to shape its agenda.

Local Government Reorganisation in Oxfordshire

- 2.8** West Oxfordshire District Council has been working closely with Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Berkshire Council (an existing unitary council) to develop and submit a proposal for reorganising local government in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. This proposal was for two unitary councils covering Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.
- 2.9** The Council worked with these partner councils to engage local residents in this process. This allowed residents and businesses to help shape the proposal and they were also encouraged to engage with the government consultation.
- 2.10** Ahead of the government's decision on LGR in Oxfordshire, West Oxfordshire District Council is working closely with all the Oxfordshire councils, plus West Berkshire Council,

to plan for the implementation of the structure the government decides to take forward. This planning will look to ensure the smooth transition of services to the new councils.

- 2.11 The Leader of the Council has worked closely with the other council leaders and Chief Executives in Oxfordshire across this period to effectively manage the process on behalf of West Oxfordshire residents and businesses.

3. OXFORD GROWTH COMMISSION

- 3.1 Neale Coleman CBE was appointed by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as Chair of the Oxford Growth Commission in May 2025. His role is to support the delivery of infrastructure, housing and employment to unleash Oxford and Oxfordshire's economic power as part of the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor.
- 3.2 The Oxford Growth Commission released its interim report in December 2025. The interim report reflects early findings and priorities for coordinated spatial, housing, economic and infrastructure planning across the county. The report recognises that county is one of the fastest-growing UK economies, driven by knowledge-intensive sectors, the University of Oxford's research ecosystem and major innovation assets such as Harwell. The report details early findings on how to accelerate sustainable and inclusive economic growth across Oxford and Oxfordshire.
- 3.3 The report identifies priority opportunity areas for new development, including land around the reopened Cowley Branch Line, Oxford Central and West End, Oxford and Kidlington stations, and existing strategic allocations such as Salt Cross, Eynsham and the proposed new town at Heyford Park. The Commission intends to work in partnership with Homes England to accelerate up to ten sites capable of delivering new homes within eighteen months.
- 3.4 The report calls for a joined-up spatial and investment strategy across the county, supported by decisions on local government reorganisation and the development of new spatial development strategies. Stronger coordination and partnership between central government, local authorities, infrastructure bodies and delivery partners is identified as essential to unlocking Oxfordshire's full economic potential.
- 3.5 West Oxfordshire have been a key partner in these conversations and hosted a delegation from the Growth Commission in 2025 while they were developing their report. This visit highlighted the potential of West Oxfordshire and advocated for key improvements the Council would like to see such as infrastructure investment. On top of the visit the Council has engaged more widely with the Commission, holding a number of key meetings over the year.

4. LOCAL DELIVERY PARTNERSHIPS

Publica

- 4.1 West Oxfordshire District Council is a key partner and shareholder in Publica, a Teckal company West Oxfordshire District Council jointly owns with a number of other local councils. Publica delivers a significant number of services on behalf of the Council in partnership with other authorities across the area.
- 4.2 In November 2024 a number of council services transferred back to direct council employment. There were further transfers in July 2025 and in April 2026. These transfers enabled the Council to have more control over service delivery. Publica remains the delivery partner for a large number of council services and no further significant service moves are expected ahead of any LGR related changes.
- 4.3 Over the last year the Council has worked closely with the Publica senior management the other shareholder council's on restructuring Publica since services were brought back into the councils. This has been to enable Publica to continue to deliver good services for the Council.
- 4.4 There has also been work to review the funding of Publica. The Publica partnership agreed to adopt a re-based cost model from 2026/27 following Phase 1 and 2 of the Publica Review. This new cost model ensures that the funding provided to Publica is proportionate to the services received by each council in the partnership. This was reflected in the 2026/27 budget and has resulted in a saving to West Oxfordshire.
- 4.5 The Council remains committed to working in close partnership with Publica and partner councils to deliver the LGR transition and continue the effective delivery of services during this period.

Ubico

- 4.6 West Oxfordshire District Council is a key partner and shareholder in Ubico, a Teckal company West Oxfordshire District Council jointly owns with a number of other local councils. Ubico delivers a significant number of waste collection and environmental services on behalf of the Council.
- 4.7 Work has continued with Ubico to explore how to deliver better and more efficient services. The progress of this has been reflected in new electric vehicles and through the 2026/27 budget. West Oxfordshire remains one of the top areas in the country for recycling rates and operates a very successful collection service.
- 4.8 In January 2026 the Executive approved the Waste and Environmental Services Programme to explore future working arrangements for delivering waste services across Oxfordshire in partnership with Oxfordshire councils.
- 4.9 This work is ongoing and the Council will continue to work in partnership with Ubico and the other Oxfordshire councils on further developing these proposals and preparing for LGR.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

1.1. The Council could choose not to participate in strategic partnership activity, however this would limit its ability to tackle cross boundary issues and share best practice.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

1.2. The Council pays the following annual fees for membership of the organisations listed in this report where they are required:

1.3. Local Government Association - £13,429.57

1.4. Local Councils Network - £3,384

1.5. South East Councils – £1,845

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

1.6. None

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

1.7. A partnership approach helps mitigate some of the risks facing the Council, although there are potential impacts on the Council if one of these partnerships should fail both in terms of direct services and reputational risk.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

1.8. None from this report

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