



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	COUNCIL – 16 SEPTEMBER 2026
Subject	COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Andy Graham - Leader of the Council Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
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Summary/Purpose	To present proposals for undertaking a Community Governance Review focused on the civic boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney, in response to full Council on 28 January 2026 agreeing an amended motion titled “Local Governance Review: Parish and Town Boundary Review for West Oxfordshire”.
Annexes	Annex A – Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney Community Governance Review 2026/27: Draft Terms of Reference
Recommendations	That Council resolves to: 1. Note that, subject to the government’s review of local government reorganisation, delivering local government reorganisation while supporting business as usual activities will be the Council’s immediate and overriding governance priority and will be resource intensive over the coming period. 2. Note that, given the time a CGR will take to complete and the uncertain timeline for local government reorganisation, any decisions resulting from a CGR undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council may be taken by a successor unitary authority

	following Vesting Day (previously 1 April 2028, now TBC), in accordance with the Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008. 3. Agree to begin a Community Governance Review (CGR) prior to local government reorganisation focused specifically on reviewing the civic boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney where development has taken place or is taking place outside of town council boundaries. 4. Agree the terms of reference for the CGR attached at Annex A. 5. Delegate authority to the Director of Governance and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, to make minor amendments to the Terms of Reference to reflect any changes agreed at Full Council. 6. Authorise officers to advise Oxfordshire County Council of the Community Governance Review in accordance with Section 79 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. 7. Agree to invite proposals from Carterton Town Council and its surrounding parishes, Chipping Norton Town Council and its surrounding parishes and Witney Town Council and its surrounding parishes, for changes to civic parish boundaries. 8. Agree that the Constitution Working Group will oversee the review, engage with ward members and report back to Council with initial proposals for public consultation, and subsequently final recommendations following public consultation to put forward to full Council or a successor unitary authority. 9. Note that if a successor unitary council is the ultimate decision maker then it will decide whether or not to give effect to any recommendation put to it and may wish to undertake further work on this CGR and/or a wider community governance review post-reorganisation, once the role of town and parish councils within future unitary structures is clearer.
Corporate priorities	• Putting Residents First • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Executive Members Senior Leadership Team Publica Managing Director Head of Communications and Corporate Strategy Communications Manager

	Head of Legal Services Electoral Services Manager Chief Technology Officer Senior Address Management and GIS Officer Head of Planning Planning Policy Manager Infrastructure Delivery Lead Regeneration Lead for Carterton Area Strategy
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The government announced on 7 September 2026 that it will review its local government reorganisation decisions across England. This report was written prior to that announcement and has been reviewed and updated in light of it prior to publication on 8 September. The announcement does not substantially change the proposed approach or timeline as set out in the report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- I.1 Council on 28 January 2026 passed an amended motion instructing officers to consider undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR) to review civic boundaries and to bring forward proposals once the Government's decision on local government reorganisation (LGR) in Oxfordshire is known.
- I.2 Witney Town Council has also requested that the Council undertakes a CGR in relation to the parish of Witney to realign boundaries specific to that area and has previously submitted proposals for boundary changes.
- I.3 The purpose of this report is to present members with further details of the scope, timetable, process and implications of undertaking a CGR following consideration by officers, so that Council can take an informed decision about whether or not to proceed with a CGR and if so, on what basis.
- I.4 While delivering local government reorganisation (LGR) is likely to be the overriding priority, officers consider that a phased approach to reviewing community governance would be appropriate (and achievable). The boundaries of the three principal settlements are proposed to be considered in advance of LGR and recommendations made to full Council or a successor unitary authority (depending on which body will be the ultimate decision maker), with remaining issues considered by the successor unitary authority post-LGR.
- I.5 The draft Terms of Reference for the first CGR are included at Annex A to the report. The terms of reference propose that the Council undertakes a CGR focused on:
 - a) The boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney only.
 - b) Any consequential impacts on Town Council warding within Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney.
 - c) Any consequential impacts on councillor numbers at these town and parish councils.
- I.6 A full CGR for the whole of the district is not recommended at this stage due to the complexity of undertaking such a significant exercise, the need to deliver LGR and the uncertainty around future structures and the longer-term role of town and parishes within a unitary council area.
- I.7 Given what is involved in a CGR, on the original LGR timetable it would not have been possible to complete a review and implement any agreed changes prior to the start of the transition period to a successor unitary authority i.e. by the time the Structural Changes

Order (SCO) to reorganise local government structures in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, comes into effect. As such, the Council would not be the ultimate decision maker on recommendations arising from a CGR, this would be a matter for the successor unitary authority, post-Vesting Day. However, in view of the government announcement on 7 September 2026 it may be that the Council would be able to complete a view and be the decision maker prior to any SCO taking effect.

- 1.8** If Council decides to proceed with a CGR prior to LGR then the first stage would be to invite proposals from the specific town and parish councils detailed in the Terms of Reference (Annex A). A further report in early 2027 would then recommend proceeding with a public consultation to take place soon after the May 2027 local elections. Council would then consider the outcome of the consultation and decide on the recommendations resulting from the CGR to put forward to the successor unitary authority for consideration post-Vesting Day.

2. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

- 2.1** West Oxfordshire District Council (“The Council”) has responsibility for conducting Community Governance Reviews (CGRs) in West Oxfordshire when such exercises are deemed necessary. CGRs are the means by which a principal council can review town and parish council arrangements:
- Changing parish boundaries
 - Creating/abolishing parishes
 - Creating/abolishing parish councils
 - Merging or splitting parishes
 - Grouping and de-grouping parishes
 - Town/parish councillor numbers
 - Town/parish warding
 - Changing parish names/styles
- 2.2** A principal council can undertake a CGR at any time. Guidance on CGRs states that it is good practice for a principal council to consider conducting a review every 10-15 years as well as in circumstances where there has been significant new housing development.
- 2.3** A CGR can also be conducted as/when requests for change are received in the form of valid petitions and applications. Where a Council is required to undertake a CGR by a valid petition, it would need to be completed within 12 months of the Terms of Reference being agreed.
- 2.4** The rationale for conducting a CGR focused on town and parish boundaries is to consider whether it is necessary to re-align boundaries to better reflect the geography of local communities and their sense of place and identity, whether rural, suburban or urban, and facilitate effective and convenient local government. A CGR may be considered especially relevant where developments have been built around existing towns but outside of town

council boundaries impacting community identity and effective and convenient community governance.

- 2.5 It is not always the case that a review is required for an entire area. Small scale reviews are considered appropriate for certain areas. In many cases making changes to existing boundaries and parishes will be sufficient to redress perceived or actual imbalances while also retaining local identity and effective and convenient governance and representation without the need for creation of entirely new parishes.
- 2.6 Guidance on CGRs states that a review may need to be carried out, for example, following a major change in the population of a community or to re-draw boundaries which have become anomalous, for example following new housing developments being built across existing boundaries.
- 2.7 When considering a CGR the Council is required to consider the impact of community governance arrangements/changes on community cohesion, and the size, population and boundaries of a local community or parish.
- 2.8 Any decision taken by a Council on changes to parishes should take account of the recommendations put forward as part of an appropriate CGR. Such a review would take account of the views of local people through appropriate consultation.
- 2.9 Councils considering CGRs must carefully consider the consequential impacts of changes on other tiers of government as these may provide the building blocks for future structures (such as unitary authorities).
- 2.10 Guidance on CGRs expands on the broad legislative principles and considerations stated in LGPIHA 2007. Within the guidance, identities and interests of a community are considered to be key to establishing sustainable communities that exhibit community cohesion. The importance of parish councils to community representation and local administration is highlighted throughout the guidance and it is suggested that “for both of these purposes a parish should reflect a distinctive and recognisable community of place, with its own sense of identity”. Great weight is therefore to be placed on parishes being reflective of how people perceive where they live and that they should reflect their own distinctive and recognisable communities and identity in considering administrative boundaries. Such communities and identities are suggested to lead to community cohesion. Effective and convenient local government should give users of services a democratic voice, and these communities should be viable in providing at least some local services, easily reached and accessible to local people. It is recognised that not all parish councils are in a position to take on provision of services.
- 2.11 Notwithstanding the core considerations detailed above, changes resulting from a CGR could affect:
 - Where future Community Infrastructure Levy (“CIL”) funding goes,
 - The levels of Council Tax paid by the affected properties (as precepts will generally be higher in towns than in parishes),
 - The tax base and incomes of precepting parish and town councils, and

- Electoral arrangements for the towns, parishes and future unitary authority.

- 2.12** Clearly, given these factors, administrative boundary changes resulting from a CGR may benefit some local councils financially while negatively affecting others. In addition, some residents may experience changes to their Council Tax resulting from a boundary change. However, CIL and Council Tax precepts are not considered to be valid reasons for considering administrative boundary changes in a CGR. The justification for any change would need to be based on residents' sense of place and how and where they access local services as part of the wider concept of community and ensuring convenient community governance. It should be noted that CIL and S106 fund allocation is framed in planning legislation and not in LGPIHA 2007 and subsequent guidance which define the considerations to be taken into account in CGRs.
- 2.13** Notwithstanding the above points, as financial impacts may be present for parishes and individuals, any proposed changes are likely to be contested locally as there will be competing communities of interest.
- 2.14** In two-tier locations, district councils are required to notify county councils of the intention to undertake a review as county councils provide a strategic role in the provision of services and their views should be sought.
- 2.15** Decision making on community governance reviews at principal councils subject to LGR is governed by the Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008. The Council could decide to start and carry out the process of a CGR but would not be able to agree to make a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order (ROCG) to give effect to recommendations arising from a CGR once the first transition period has started (i.e. when the SCO comes into force). The successor unitary council when in shadow form would also be unable to make an ROGC. As such, it would be for the successor unitary council to agree to make an ROGC after Vesting Day (previously 1 April 2028, now TBC). In this scenario the unitary council would receive the recommendations arising from a CGR undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council but would not be bound to accept them and would have all potential options open to it (e.g. accept, disregard, re-consult, start again).

3. BACKGROUND TO THE REQUEST FOR A COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

- 3.1** Council passed a motion on 28 January 2026 which requested officers to consider the Council undertaking a CGR focused specifically on parish and town boundary arrangements across West Oxfordshire and to bring forward proposals for conducting a CGR once the decision on LGR in Oxfordshire is known. The motion suggested that the review should:
- Assess whether existing boundaries remain appropriate considering housing growth, demographic change, and community identity.
 - Consider requests or representations from parish and town councils and residents.
 - Seek to ensure boundaries promote effective governance, community cohesion, and clarity for residents.

- 3.2 Although the motion referred to officers considering undertaking a CGR in general, in the subsequent debate on the amended motion, specific reference was made to Carterton and Witney as the areas where such a review would be appropriate.
- 3.3 Witney Town Council has twice requested a CGR specific to the parishes of Witney and surrounding areas.
- 3.4 Similarly, officers understand that Chipping Norton is seeking to make some amendments to its boundaries to take in specific parcels of land from Over Norton parish.

4. PROPOSED SCOPE OF THE CGR PRIOR TO LGR

- 4.1 Officers propose a phased approach to reviewing community governance in the area, with some specific boundary issues considered prior to LGR and a fuller community governance review post-LGR to be undertaken by a successor unitary authority, appreciating that reviewing community governance is unlikely to be an immediate priority for a newly formed authority.
- 4.2 This report brings forward proposals for the first CGR focused specifically on the boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney. The rationale being that these towns have relatively constrained boundaries and/or development has taken place adjoining existing settlements but outside of town council boundaries. It is therefore considered appropriate to review the boundaries of these towns and the surrounding parishes in governance terms, framed in the core considerations of interests and identities of the communities and their effective and convenient governance.
- 4.3 Guidance suggests that civil parish boundaries should follow natural boundaries wherever possible e.g. rivers, roads, railway lines.
- 4.4 Any changes to boundaries resulting from a CGR may have consequential implications for the number of councillors that the affected town and parish councils wish to have and to the warding arrangements within the town council areas. These issues would need to be considered and addressed as part of this CGR with reference to forecast electorate figures (5-years from start of the CGR).
- 4.5 It is not proposed that this review considers the governance arrangements for unbuilt planned settlements e.g. Salt Cross. The creation of new civil parishes should be considered at a time when there will be sufficient residents living in the new settlement for a new parish council to be viable and a sense of community to have been established. It is recognised that this is a longer-term issue which will need to be considered in a future CGR (post LGR).
- 4.6 There are allocated sites in the vicinities of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney and the surrounding parishes within the Draft Local Plan 2043. Where these are only broad allocations at this stage it would be premature to consider them within this CGR, given the timescales involved in planning and building out new developments. The length of time it may take to obtain outline permission and begin construction will likely extend beyond the horizon of a CGR undertaken over the coming period. Furthermore, in such cases, officers consider that there are risks associated with adjusting parish boundaries without having been able to consult the communities that will eventually occupy them. Such changes prior

to occupation could result in a need to reverse changes should residents feel that the community cohesion and effective governance would better align with another parish. Again, these are longer-term issues that should be considered as part of a fuller CGR undertaken by the successor unitary council post-LGR. Developments sites could be considered within this CGR where the planning process is sufficiently advanced and there is a high degree of confidence that developments will be occupied in under 5 years.

- 4.7** It is not recommended that the CGR proposed in this report is expanded to include issues such as replacing parish meetings with parish councils, parish boundaries in areas other than Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney, nor the number of councillors that town and parish councils have in areas other than Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney. This would add complexity to the review and put the timetable at risk given the need for resources to be focused on successfully delivering LGR (subject to the government's review) as well as business as usual activities. It would be more appropriate for these issues to be considered in a separate CGR (post-LGR).

5. TIMETABLE

- 5.1** Full details of the proposed stages and an indicative timetable for the CGR can be found in the proposed Terms of Reference at Annex A.
- 5.2** If Council approves the recommendation to undertake a CGR for Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney, the town and parish councils in the affected areas would be invited to put forward any proposals for boundary changes. Following consideration of any such proposals by the Constitution Working Group, Council would be recommended to agree a public consultation on boundary changes to be held in summer 2027 (following the local elections). If at the end of the review following the public consultation, changes to boundaries are deemed appropriate, recommendations would be made to either full Council if prior to the first LGR transition period, or the successor unitary council for a decision post-Vesting Day.
- 5.3** Any agreed recommendations would be given effect through a Reorganisation Order.
- 5.4** Subject to the government's review of LGR, local elections in May 2027 are expected to be district elections by thirds held on existing boundaries. Currently there is uncertainty about the timing of elections to a shadow successor unitary authority. Any boundary changes resulting from this CGR would be taken into account in an electoral review of the successor unitary council undertaken by the LGBCE. This review would determine unitary ward boundaries effective from the following set of scheduled local elections.
- 5.5** The motion as amended requested that officers consider the CGR in light of the timeline for LGR. Following the announcement on 7 September 2026 that the government will review LGR decisions across England, there is uncertainty around the timeline for LGR. The original timeline that the Council was working on for LGR was as follows:
- August/September 2026 – Draft Local Plan Regulation 19 public consultation.

- Autumn 2026 – SCO and clarity about electoral arrangements for North Oxfordshire Council.
- Late 2026/early 2027 SCO comes into force and the Council loses the ability to make an ROGC.
- December 2026 – publication of electoral register, reflecting electoral arrangements for whole-council shadow unitary elections in May 2027 on existing boundaries.
- May 2027 – elections to scheduled town, parish and shadow unitary councils.
- 1 April 2028 – Vesting Day: transfer of functions to North Oxfordshire Council and abolition of West Oxfordshire District Council.
- After 1 April 2028 – North Oxfordshire Council considers recommendations arising from the CGR.
- After April 2028 – Electoral review of North Oxfordshire Council undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

5.6 Advice was sought from the LGBCE on the appropriateness of embarking on a CGR at the current time. LGBCE advised that in such circumstances officers should contact Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for further comment. The comment given by MHCLG was understandably general. However, MHCLG reiterated the timeframes given above that include unitary councils “going live” in April 2028. A Structural Order was expected to be put forward in late 2026 and to come into force ahead of the elections in May 2027. The SCO would have established electoral arrangements for the unitary councils’ inaugural elections (based on existing boundaries).

5.7 The LGBCE were also unable to provide clarity about the timing of the electoral review of the successor unitary authority, other than that this would take place sometime between 2028 and 2032 ahead of the unitary council elections in May 2032. It was unclear therefore whether or not the successor unitary authority would have time to undertake a CGR prior to its electoral review by the LGBCE.

6. APPROACH

- 6.1** In making its recommendations, the CGR would consider and have due regard to the information it had received in the form of expressions of local opinion on the matters considered, representations made by local people and other interested persons. Such consultation to gather opinion was also expressed as essential in the motion as amended to Council.
- 6.2** Given the importance of public consultation, the Council will allow appropriate time for consultation with local electors and other stakeholders and for analysis of the submissions received.
- 6.3** Initially the Council would invite proposals from affected parish and town councils, a full list of which can be found in the Terms of Reference. This exercise would commence following the agreement of Council to undertake the CGR for a period of 3 months.

- 6.4 The Constitution Working Group, in consultation with Ward Members, would consider the proposals put forward by town and parish councils and make initial recommendations to the Council to put to public consultation.
- 6.5 A public consultation would then take place to seek views of the local electorate on proposed changes put forwards, in addition to representations from any other person or body who appears to have an interest in the review. This is in accordance with the duties the principal council must comply with as detailed in Part 4, Chapter 3 s.93 (3) of LGPIHA 2007. This consultation period would be envisaged to take place for a period of 2 months following the May 2027 local elections, avoiding peak holiday periods (suggested September to October 2027).
- 6.6 Should recommendations put forward following completion of the CGR not be accepted, and instead be amended, a further period of consultation would be required to take place on new proposals. Post-Vesting Day, the successor unitary authority would have the ability to conduct a further CGR should it wish to do so and as part of that could (re)consider any matters covered in a CGR undertaken by the District Council.
- 6.7 To help to ensure that the final recommendations would be acceptable, it is proposed that the review is overseen by the Constitution Working Group (CWG), which will engage with Ward Members at each stage. The CWG will be supported by a cross-service Officer Working Group.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. Council could decide to undertake a CGR for the whole of the district prior to LGR. This is not recommended due to the significant complexity involved in undertaking a district-wide CGR, LGR, and the longer-term nature of many community governance issues (e.g. site allocations, Salt Cross, the future role of town and parish councils in a unitary area) that would be better considered post-LGR. Additional resources may be required to manage the expanded process, consultation feedback, meetings and recommendations would be required as set out in the Financial Implications.
- 7.2. Council could decide not to conduct the CGR. However, the CGR is the only process available for altering parish boundaries. If the Council decides not to undertake a CGR at this time then there is a risk that there will be no opportunity to make changes to town and parish boundaries prior to the electoral review of the successor unitary authority, meaning that future warding arrangements for the unitary council would be based on current parish boundaries, which may not align with the geography of local communities and provide for effective and convenient governance.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1. Council is recommended to undertake a CGR focused specifically on the boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney due to the potential impact of recent development on community cohesion and effective and convenient governance in those parishes, the case put forward in the recent Council motion, and the request from Witney Town Council.

- 8.2. Officers do not consider that it is appropriate to extend a review of boundaries to other areas of West Oxfordshire at this stage or to consider other issues that may be addressed through a CGR e.g. the abolition of parish meetings. Instead, these issues should be addressed in a future CGR (post-LGR) although it is appreciated that this is unlikely to be an immediate priority for a newly formed authority.
- 8.3. It is intended that a final report and recommendations of the CGR would be brought to Council in by no later than March 2028.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Following the motion brought to Council in January 2026, £50,000 has been allocated in the budget for the work to be undertaken to consider undertaking a CGR. It is considered that a limited CGR focused on the boundaries of Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney and could be resourced within this budget envelope. A wider review looking at all civil parish boundaries and/or other issues such as the abolition of parish meetings would be more complex and challenging to undertake within existing resources.
- 9.2 If Council was minded to prioritise resourcing a broader and more comprehensive CGR, notwithstanding the timeline and capacity issues identified above and the likely priority of delivering LGR, it would require additional resources and a further report would need to be brought back to the Executive and Council. This would add delay and risk a CGR not being completed in good time.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (LGPIHA 2007) provides the legal framework for considering and undertaking CGRs. In addition, Section 100 (4) of LGPIHA 2007, instructs principal councils to have regard to the 2010 Guidance issued by the Secretary of State and Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) in such matters.
- 10.2. LGPIHA 2007 Part 4, Chapter 3, devolves the power to take decisions about the creation, abolition or alteration of parishes, and their electoral arrangements, to district councils, London Boroughs or unitaries whichever is appropriate (Principal Councils).
- 10.3. Section 100(4) of LGPIHA 2007 requires principal councils to have regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State under s100(1) and (3) and the LGBC England under s100(2).
- 10.4. Other pieces of legislation also need to be complied with, such as the Local Government Act 1972 - in relation to parish meetings and councils, the constitution of the parish councils and requirements relating to parish councillors - and the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, in relation to reviews and recommendations about electoral areas by the Boundary Commission.
- 10.5. The decision to undertake a CGR is specified in the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 as a non-Executive function. Therefore, Council rather than the Executive is the decision-making body required to approve a CGR.

10.6. Regulation 7 of The Local Government (Structural Changes) (Transitional Arrangements) Regulations 2008 provides that where a CGR is undertaken by a council that is subject to LGR, the predecessor council must exercise its power to give effect to the recommendations before the start of the transition period (i.e. before the Structural Changes Order comes into force), otherwise the successor council becomes the decision maker.

11. RISK ASSESSMENT

11.1. A CGR is a significant exercise which may result in tangible changes to communities. There is a risk that a CGR could not be delivered at the same time as LGR which is likely to be the overriding priority, hence quite a focused review is proposed which would aim to consider and address specific issues that have been raised by members and Witney Town Council. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the review may not be completed.

11.2. There is a risk that the decision maker (whether full Council or a successor unitary authority) would choose not to give effect to any recommendations arising from a CGR undertaken by West Oxfordshire District Council. This risk can be mitigated to some extent by the Constitution Working Group overseeing the review and engaging with Ward Members on specific proposals.

12. EQUALITIES IMPACT

12.1. There are no equalities impacts associated with the recommendations in this report.

13. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no sustainability implications associated with the recommendations in this report.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 None.

(END)