



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Local Government Reorganisation: Consultation Briefing

**Towns and Parishes
11th February 2026**

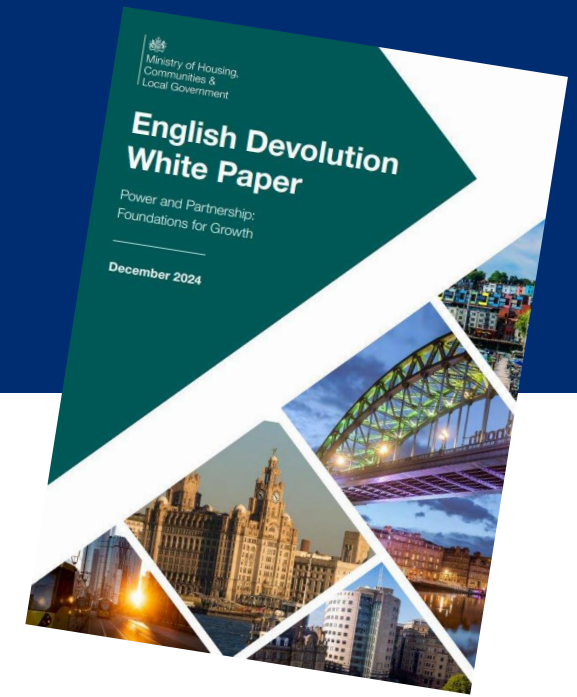
Local Government Reorganisation



- **An end to two tiers of local government**
- **One tier of local government providing all of its services to residents**



What's happened so far?



Government published its Devolution and Local Government Reform White Paper, inviting all two-tier areas to develop proposals

We held public engagement and local events across Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, which helped shape our preferred two-unitary approach

Public consultation launched

Mar 2025

28 Nov 2025

Dec 2024

Summer 2025

5 Feb 2026

Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Councils submitted an interim plan outlining the three possible proposals

Three proposals for Oxfordshire were submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)



Benefits of Unitarisation

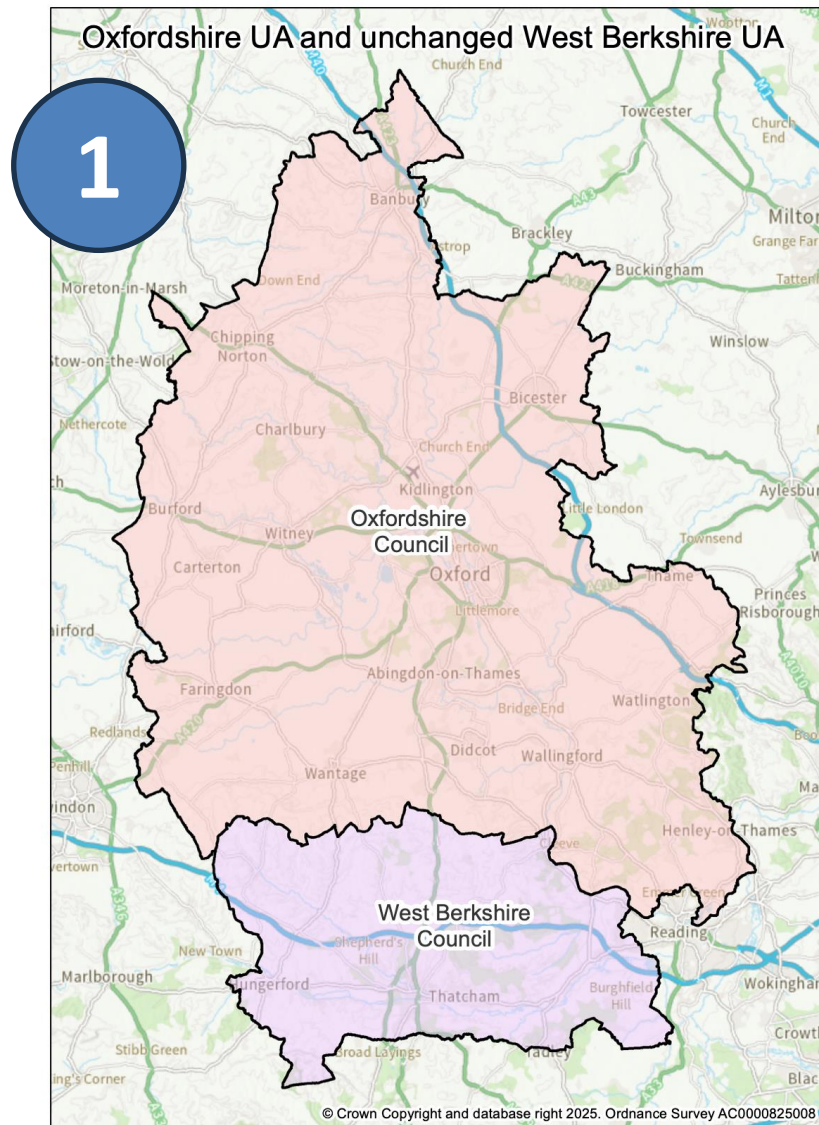
- **More consistent and coordinated service delivery**
- **Clear accountability**
- **Greater flexibility in service design**
- **Securing economies of scale**
- **Stronger alignment with regional governance**
- **A shared and skilled workforce**
- **Alignment of strategic planning**



What makes District Councils Special?

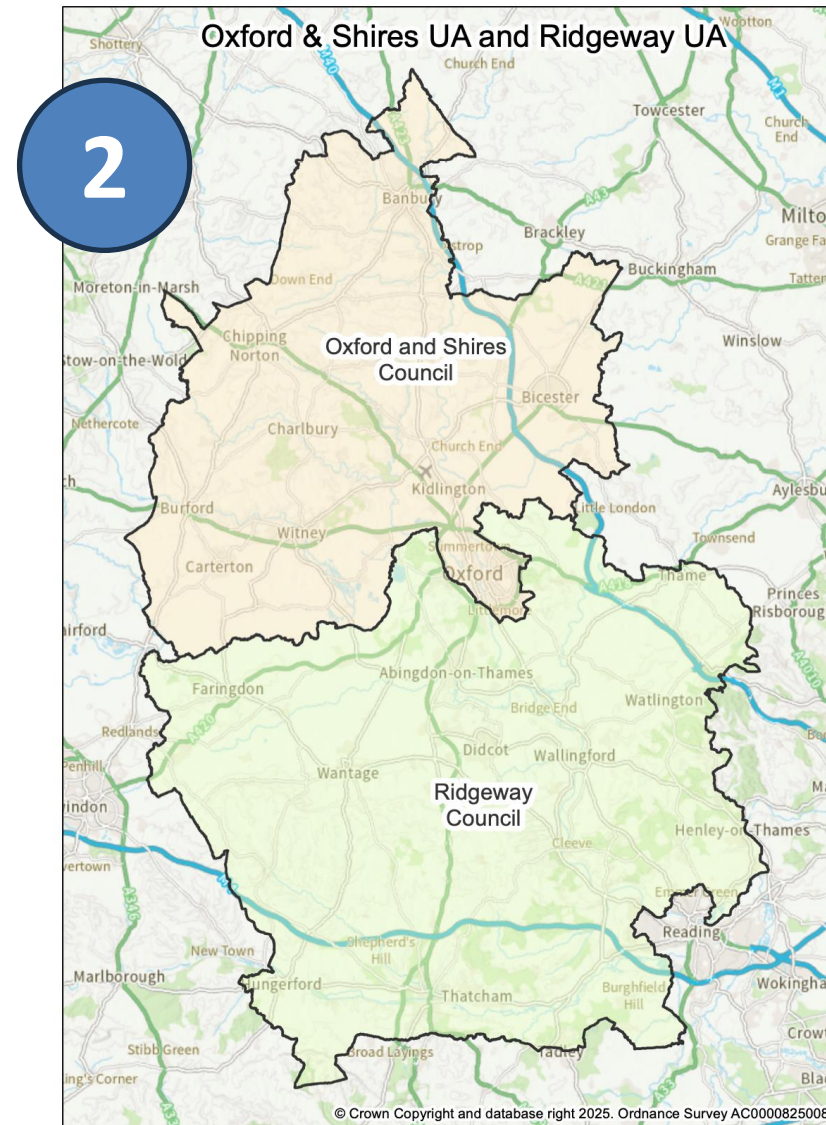


The Three Options

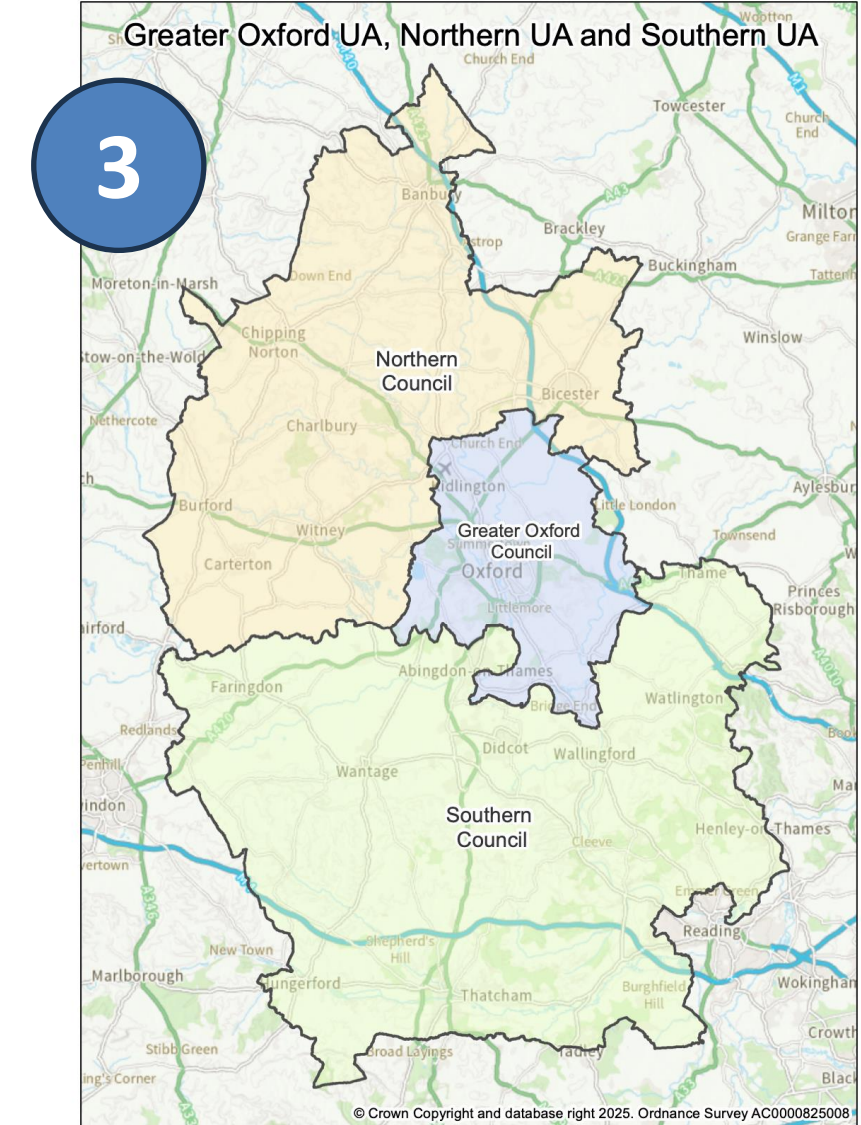


Oxfordshire UA 796,608*
West Berkshire UA 163,811

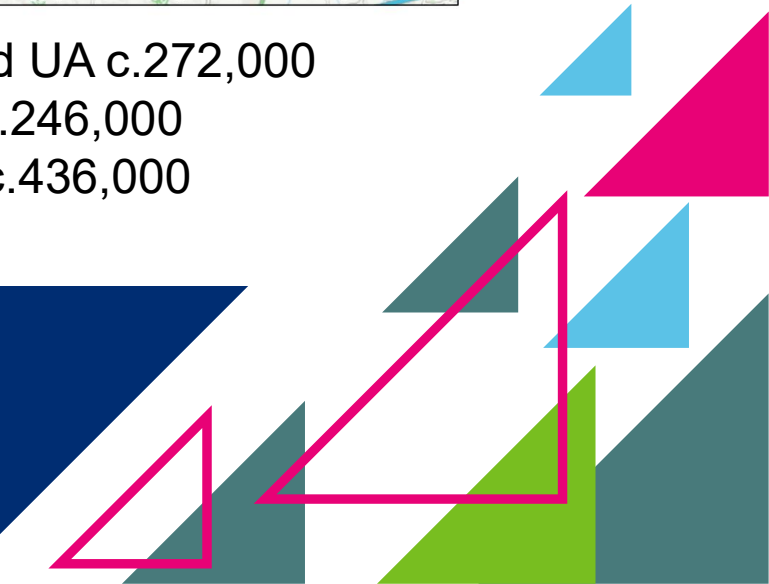
* projected 2028 Vesting Day populations



Oxford & Shires UA 471,716
Ridgeway Council UA 482,703



Greater Oxford UA c.272,000
Northern UA c.246,000
Southern UA c.436,000



The Six Government Criteria

- 1. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**
- 2. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.**
- 3. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.**
- 4. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.**
- 5. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.**
- 6. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**



Appraising the Options

Overall Summary of Options Appraisal

MHCLG Headline Criteria	Option 1 – Oxfordshire UA & West Berkshire UA	Option 2 – Oxford & Shires and Ridgeway UAs	Option 3 – Greater Oxford UA & two other UAs
1. A single tier and sensible geography to improve housing supply and outcomes avoiding creating (dis)advantaged areas	R Positive for housing supply and outcomes in Oxfordshire. West Berkshire remains disadvantaged in terms of financial sustainability	G Enables housing supply and outcomes over across whole area and does not create material (dis)advantaged areas	R Challenges around nature and deliverability of housing supply. Creates (dis)advantaged areas based on financial analysis
2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	R Creates one of the larger unitary councils in England and leaves one which is significantly below the guidance level	G Creates two unitary councils at the optimal scale to achieve efficiencies, create capacity and avoid the risks of being too large	R Creates two unitary councils that are materially smaller than the guidance level limiting scope to achieve efficiencies
3. Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	A Avoids disruption to key services but also risks little improvement through keeping too much of the status quo	A Some short term alignment will need to be managed but scale and existing services offer the chance to really tailor and improve outcomes	R Wholesale disaggregation of county & district services (with boundary change) will be required delaying improvements & increasing costs
4. Councils work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views	R Concerns over engagement of West Berkshire and in rural areas in Oxfordshire	A Clear support for considering West Berkshire along with Oxfordshire in shaping the future of local government in the area	R Concerns over the extent of engagement beyond city and issues over protecting the greenbelt
5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements	A Risk of distinct economic strengths being lost in a large Oxfordshire and leaves an imbalance of UAs in the Combined Authority context	G Coherent economic geographies to support effective growth and devolution aims – with optimal sized unitary authorities	A Could be seen to provide a strong growth hub around city but would leave small authorities in relation to Combined Authority
6. Enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment	A Risk that scale and lack of effective community engagement at that level could result in poor community engagement	G Strong localities model building on proven track record of effective community engagement and growth	G Likely to resolve issues in terms of community engagement within the city

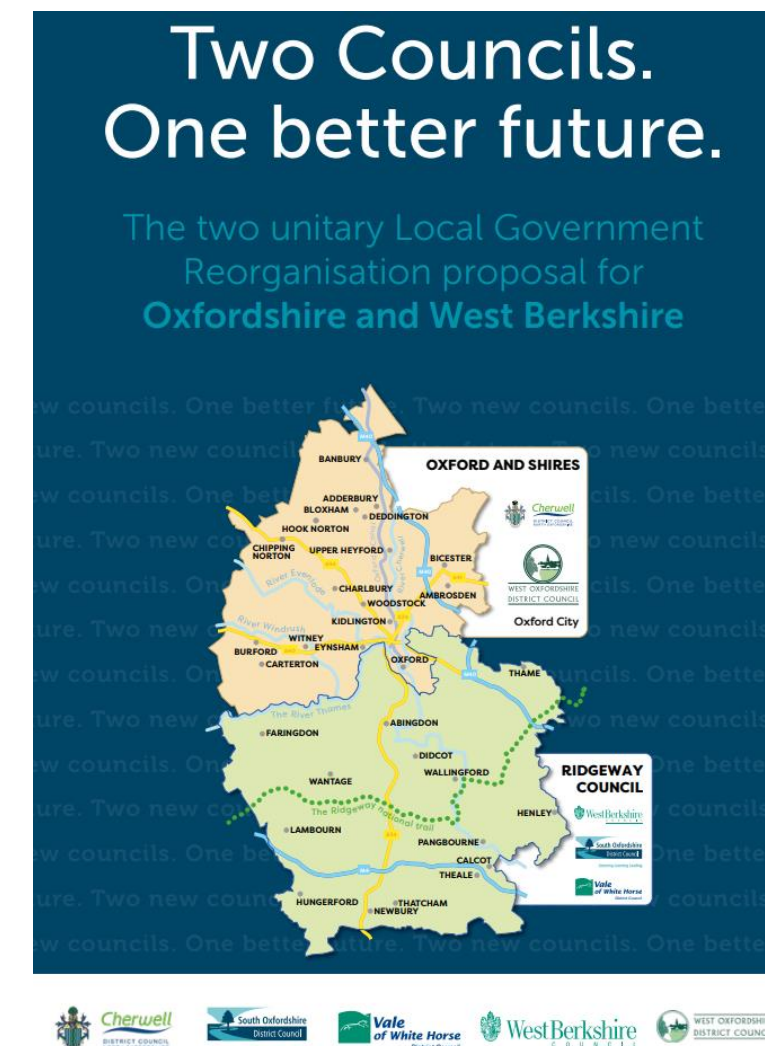
R Does not meet the criterion
 A Partially meets the criterion
 G Meets the criterion



Key Messages

“Strong enough to be efficient, but local enough to stay connected”

- **Keep decision-making local**
- **Chance to improve council services**
- **Delivers exceptional value for money**
- **Supports growth and opportunity**
- **Will be based on our communities**



Local Neighbourhood Areas

- **Our proposal is based on the importance of community and locality.**
- **Two unitaries provides an effective scale to be responsive to towns, parishes and community organisations while empowering you to be involved in decisions.**
- **This will be achieved through Local Neighbourhood Areas supported by Area Delivery Boards to shape place-based priorities.**
- **Focused on hyperlocal issues, collaboration and the voice of communities.**



What's next?

- **Consultation** – The statutory consultation was launched on 5th February.
- **Decision** – Summer 2026 (pre-summer recess) we expect to be notified of the Ministerial decision confirming which proposal will go ahead.
- **Legislation** – This will be followed by the preparation of necessary legislation for parliamentary approval.
- **Shadow Authority Elections** – May 2027, local elections will be held for shadow authorities.
- **Vesting Day** – 1st April 2028, the new authorities will take over and replace the existing six councils.



The government consultation

- **Now open and closes on 26th March 2026.**
- **Survey where consultees are asked to rank each of the proposals based on the government's criteria plus option for text answers.**
- **Choice to write to the government to express views.**
- **The government has invited named consultees to respond.**

Consultation on Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Oxfordshire

Overview

This statutory consultation seeks views on the proposals that the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has received following the Secretary of State's invitation to councils in Oxfordshire to submit proposals for unitary local government for their area. You can find full details of the consultation, including a privacy statement, at: [Local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire - GOV.UK](#).

The 3 proposals in this consultation were made by the following councils on 28 November 2025.

1. Oxfordshire County Council proposed 1 unitary council. This would comprise the current areas of:

- **Oxfordshire:** Cherwell, Oxford City, Oxfordshire County, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, and West Oxfordshire.

You can find the proposal at: [1 unitary proposal from Oxfordshire County Council](#)

2. Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council proposed 2 unitary councils: These would comprise the current areas of:

- **Oxford and Shires Council:** Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire.
- **Ridgeway Council:** South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, plus West Berkshire (outside of invitation area).

You can find the proposal at: [2 unitary proposal from Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire](#)

Closes 26 Mar 2026

Contact

LGRconsultationresponse@Communities.gov.uk



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Communicating the consultation

- **The government will not be communicating locally and have asked councils to promote the consultation.**
- **All Oxfordshire councils will be promoting the consultation to residents.**
- **Each council will follow common wording to highlight that there are three proposals but will be making it clear which they support and why.**
- **CDC will run a joint campaign with the other councils supporting the two unitary proposal.**



How can you support?

- **Promote the consultation.**
- **Materials you can use:**
 - **Website – www.twocouncils.org**
 - **Short and full proposal on the website**
 - **Reposting and supporting communications materials – social media, newsletters, etc**
 - **Posters, flyers and postcards available – www.twocouncils.org/support - please ask if you would like printed collateral**
 - **Briefing notes on particular topics – if you need a specific briefing note let us know**



Questions



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Appendix: Three Proposal Criteria Analysis

Criteria 1: Delivering Housing

Relevant context:

- **Criteria: Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs**
- **Strategic planning for housing will take place at Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) level**

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Limited reference to housing growth plans and limited detail on approach- Would create a new Local Plan to deliver current targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focus on delivering existing housing sites- Balancing housing across area with economic growth- Focus on building social rented homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focus on delivering housing in Oxford green belt – significantly more homes than government require- Limited plans for other unitaries- Focus on building social rented homes



Criteria 1: Delivering Economic Growth

Relevant context:

- Strategic economic planning for housing will take place at MSA level

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Limited plans for economic growth- Focus on 'knowledge spine' of Bicester – Oxford - Science Vale- Very limited reference to West Oxfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focus on delivering growth along key corridors with each unitary focussing on its specific opportunities- Detailed case presented developed by specialists- Collaborating on visitor economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focus on delivering economic growth in Greater Oxford on edge of current city- Detailed case presented by specialists- Limited plans for Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway



Criteria 1: Delivering Infrastructure

Relevant context:

- Strategic infrastructure planning for housing will take place at MSA level

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reference to existing plans such as OxRail and Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy- No new plans- No reference to change in highways maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Redesign highways maintenance to improve outcomes- Invest in rail and bus transport corridors- Investment programme for energy, water and sewage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Continue current maintenance approach- Focus on transport improvement in Greater Oxford- Limited information for Northern Oxfordshire or Ridgeway



Criteria 2: Population

Relevant context:

- Criteria has said new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more
- Subsequent guidance “We have asked that all proposals, whether they are at the guided level, above it, or below it, should set out the rationale for the proposed approach clearly”
- The current largest non-metropolitan unitary authority is North Yorkshire (635,000)

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
790,000	O&S – 471,716 Ridgeway – 482,703	GO – 272,000 Ridgeway – 436,000 Northern Unitary – 246,000

* projected 2028 Vesting Day populations



Criteria 2: Financial Savings

Relevant context:

- 1UA and 2UA both used PwC and CIPFA as specialist support. Numbers below are based on PwC assessment using shared data between all three proposals.
- 1UA rules out West Berkshire but includes them in financial analysis.

	Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
Initial cost of transition	£23.8m	£30.4m	£32.5m
Potential transformation savings (per year)	£58.4m	£59.8m	£47.7m
Payback period	2.7 years	3.2 years	4.2 years



Criteria 2: Putting Local Government in the area on a Firmer Footing

Relevant context:

- **Criteria:** For areas covering councils that are in the Best Value intervention and/ or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.
- **From invite:** A single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas.

	Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
Does it address EFS concerns in West Berkshire	No	Yes	Yes



Criteria 3: Fragmentation of ASC and Children's Services

Relevant context:

- **Criteria: Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.**
- **Criteria: Opportunities to delivery public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.**

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoids disaggregation - Does not recommend improvements - No savings, focus on protecting existing service provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimises disaggregation due to two upper tier authorities - Recommends improvement in outcomes with savings - £20m+ potential savings per year after transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires disaggregation with some minimisation due to two upper tier authorities - Recommends improvement in outcomes with savings - £4-5m savings per council per year after transformation



Criteria 3: Leisure and Culture

Relevant context:

- All districts are on different leisure management contracts.

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Limited specific plans or proposals for leisure- Investment in cultural assets- Leisure and culture run through area committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Investment in leisure- Residents able to access services across the unitaries- Leisure as part of prevention and wellbeing- Investment in culture through locality teams, improved funding, working with communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Investment in leisure- Residents able to access services across the unitaries- Leisure as part of prevention and wellbeing- Museums transfer to Northern Oxfordshire- Small number of libraries maintained



Criteria 3: Planning

Relevant context:

- All districts are close to agreeing new local plans due to run to earlier-mid 2040's.
- MSA would deliver a strategic spatial plan for the whole MSA area that will set housing targets.

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliver new county local plan within a year of vesting day - Planning decisions at county level committee - Benefits of unitary planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefits of unitary planning - Better balance with MSA - Focus on opportunities across the area - Local Development Orders to speed up economic sites - Area Delivery Boards to drive shaping local areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Benefits of unitary planning - Better balance with MSA - Oxford Design Panel to support applications in Greater Oxford - Limited information on planning in Northern Oxfordshire and Ridgeway



Criteria 3: Environmental Services

Relevant context:

- OCC, Oxford City, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire are already working towards a joint waste service.
- S&V have just let a new waste collection contract with a break clause.

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Single waste service for county- Reorganise collection rounds- County commercial waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Proceed with current joint waste plans to deliver investment and efficiencies- Align Ridgeway services at end of current contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Greater Oxford and Northern Oxfordshire have shared waste service following current plans – requires a shared service approach



Criteria 4: Local Culture and History

Relevant context:

- **Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.**

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focusses on Oxfordshire as an identity- Not much on identity of individual parts of the county	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focuses on identities of unique council areas- Structure built around communities and protecting local identities- Addresses historical links between S&V and West Berks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Focuses on identities of each council area- Addresses historical links between S&V and West Berks



Criteria 5: Working with a MSA

Relevant context:

- Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any Strategic Mayoral Authority (MSA).
- Assuming Thames Valley MSA geography.
- Berkshire population over 940,000.

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- One council voice of 800k population- Council will have to deliver all aspects across Oxfordshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Two councils around 500k population providing two voices- Councils able to focus on local priorities in each area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Three council voices around 300k - 500k population- Councils able to focus on local priorities



Criteria 6: How will Communities be Engaged and Empowered?

Relevant context:

- Government has advised new parish councils should not be created adding a tax burden.
- Government has advised the Area Committee model should be considered.

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of 15 Area Committees for whole county. Suggestion they take on majority of district services - Town and parish councils to be devolved powers and services - Loose reference to parishing Oxford 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of c.12 Area Committees per council that would engage with town and parish councils and others - Devolved decision making - Input into local service provision - Oxford to get its own arrangement agreed post decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Size of councils allow proper engagement and empowerment - Reference to Area Committees but limited details - Oxford empowerment through Greater Oxford authority



Criteria 6: Democratic Representation

Relevant context:

- **Local Government Boundary Commission – “While we have no set limits, our view is that an extremely strong and compelling case would be needed for an authority made up of more than 100 members or less than 30 members: too many members and the structure potentially becomes unwieldy and accountability is diluted; too few and the authority may not be able to fully discharge its functions and effectively represent local communities”**

Single Unitary	Two Unitary	Three Unitary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No single number proposed - 138 or 119 depending on government preference for first term - Assumption boundary review would reduce to below 100 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ridgeway – 96 councillors - O&S – up to 92 councillors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater Oxford – 72 councillors - Northern Oxfordshire – up to 54 councillors - Ridgeway – 88 councillors



Key Benefits of Two Unitary Councils

A strong sense of place and identity

Both councils will be well-placed to build on the international brand of Oxford and drive economic growth across key towns in the council's area, while also protecting, connecting and supporting rural communities and bringing them improved economic prosperity.

We have strong economic clusters alongside thriving rural and market communities.



Key Benefits of Two Unitary Councils

Use of Existing Structures

The best balance on managing the disaggregation of services.

While the unitary councils will be new, we would use existing service structures, such as adult social care, children's services and highways, to avoid complex disaggregation of services, which can be costly. We would use existing structures to consolidate what is already best, improve and innovate.

Two councils for the area would provide a good balance – there is evidence suggesting that social care can get too big to be efficient or provide effective services.



Key Benefits of Two Unitary Councils

Tailor Vital Services

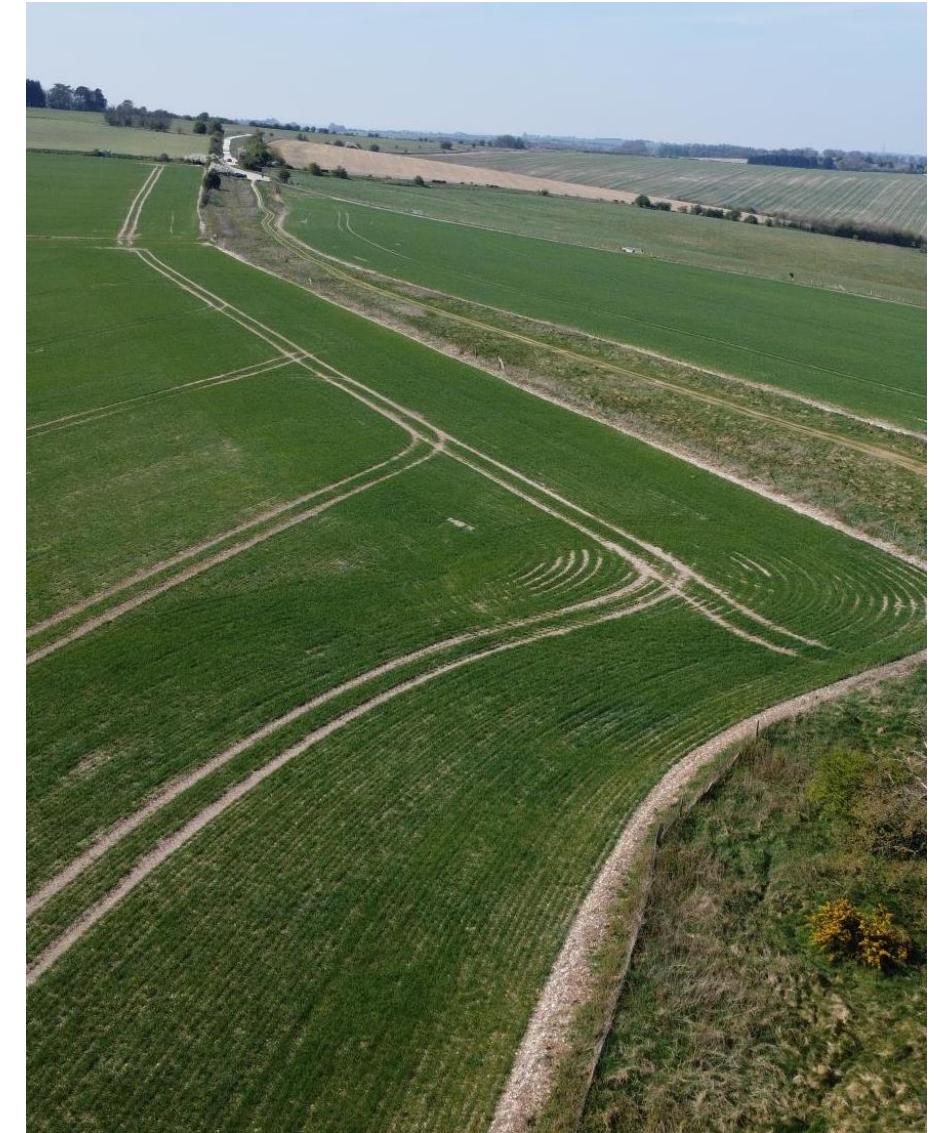
Two unitary councils would be locally-focused enough to tailor vital services such as adult social care, children's services and others to the unique needs of their individual communities while being big enough to be cost-effective.

Children's Services and SEND

Two unitary councils strike the right balance for children's services and SEND – it is large enough to sustain specialist expertise and financial resilience, but small enough to retain strong local relationships with families, schools and health partners, and to respond early and effectively to need.

Housing

Two unitary councils will bring housing need and supported housing together alongside robust plans for housing delivery making the most of the government's additional support for social housing increase in the most efficient and focussed way.



Key Benefits of Two Unitary Councils

Protecting Rural Communities

The councils will still be of a size that allows them to be responsive to the needs of individual communities. For the large number of market towns in our areas, and the countless villages and rural communities that support them – particularly the smaller communities that exist in the shadows of larger settlements – this means providing robust protections for what makes them thrive, and what makes them special.

Supporting the City's Needs

Oxford and Shire's Council provides the perfect blend – protecting Oxford's world-famous name and heritage, while partnering it with the most appropriate communities to support economic and housing growth, all while creating a council that is big enough to be financially resilient.

The Right Amount of Local Representation

The government has said no one council should have more than 100 councillors. Two councils means we strike the right balance of having enough local representatives to support communities. It also means there is a better balance between rural and urban councillors, ensuring all of our communities have a voice.



Key Benefits of Two Unitary Councils

Innovative and Modern

The new unitary councils won't just be more of the same – it is a chance for a refresh, something new and better. The councils will be forward-looking, innovative and modern; right-sized councils providing better services to residents at a lower cost. They will offer better value, quality services at a scale that makes economic sense, but also logical sense to the public.

Real Economic Benefits

The councils will focus on how the new model can bring real economic benefit to communities, strengthening existing business links in partnership and forging new ones. This includes growing the valuable rural economy, which is a large proportion of the area. The two councils will be better placed to take advantage of the unique opportunities in each part of the area.

