
Agenda Item: Future of Local Government in Oxfordshire

Meeting Date: Monday 6 October 2025

Contact Officer: Town Clerk/CEO – Sharon Groth

The purpose of this report is to update Members on developments regarding the future of local government in Oxfordshire since the last Full Council meeting held on 28 July 2025.

Background

The government continues to explore opportunities for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution across England. Oxfordshire is not currently in the “priority programme” for reorganisation, meaning its timeline is aligned with the longer-term programme (as shown in the attached LGIU LGR timeline – right-hand column).

The Council has previously agreed to remain engaged in discussions to ensure that the voice of Witney residents and the parish sector is represented as proposals evolve.

Current Situation

A previous Council resolution (Minute No. 373, 23rd June 2025) instructed the Town Clerk to engage with all three local authorities regarding the proposed restructures for local government in Oxfordshire. Accordingly, two emails have been received from WODC and Oxford City Council, while Oxfordshire County Council opted to arrange an in-person meeting with the Town Clerk to discuss its proposal in greater detail.

Since the last meeting, the following activity has taken place:

4th August 2025 – Parish Forum Meeting with West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC):

A presentation on the two-unitary proposal for Oxfordshire was given. Parish representatives participated in a workshop exercise designed to answer specific questions and help shape potential solutions around local service delivery challenges identified by the parish sector.

15th August 2025 – Meeting with Oxfordshire County Council Team:

Discussions centred on how the Oxfordshire Charter could influence and shape the one-unitary proposal, ahead of a planned wider workshop. A preliminary conversation was also

held regarding larger assets that Witney Town Council could potentially take on, and the implications of such transfers.

1st September 2025 – OCC Workshop on Parish Framework:

OCC held a further workshop with Town and Parish Councils to support development of a parish framework within its LGR proposal. As the workshop was held on the same evening as the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting, no Council Officers were able to attend. A supporting paper has been produced by OCC officers, but it is not currently available for wider circulation.

17th September 2025 – Meeting with Inner Circle Consulting (on behalf of Oxford City Council):

The focus of this meeting was to discuss the concept of Neighbourhood Boards, exploring what these could look like in practice and how the parish sector might play a role in their governance and operation.

The Town Clerk will continue to co-operate and participate in discussions and workshops as opportunities arise.

At this stage, Members are also referred to the item within Correspondence – an open letter from Cllr Keith Stevens, the outgoing Chair of NALC, entitled *“Seizing the Opportunity of Devolution.”* Members are asked to take note of the important message conveyed by Cllr Stevens regarding the future role of the parish and town council sector in shaping local government and delivering local services.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council’s Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

a) Equality: Future proposals will need to ensure fair representation for all communities, particularly where governance arrangements may affect local decision-making.

b) Biodiversity: No direct implications at this stage.

c) Crime & Disorder: No direct implications at this stage.

d) Environment & Climate Emergency: Reorganisation may provide opportunities to rationalise service delivery and reduce duplication, with potential sustainability benefits.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Uncertainty remains regarding the preferred model of governance and the eventual government decision on Oxfordshire's position. Risks include potential changes to local service responsibilities, asset management, and funding streams. Ongoing engagement with District, County and City partners helps to mitigate these risks, although the Council itself has no control over the eventual outcome, hence why engagement and discussions are key at this stage of the process.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

By actively engaging in discussions with WODC, OCC and consultants on behalf of Oxford City Council, the Town Council ensures the parish sector is represented and helps shape governance models that prioritise strong local democracy and community benefit.

Financial implications

None directly arising from this update.

However, depending on the outcome of LGR, there may be future implications for asset transfer, service responsibilities, and funding arrangements.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and agrees that the Town Clerk continues to engage with District, County, City and parish sector partners to ensure Witney Town Council's interests are represented in ongoing discussions.