
Agenda Item: Community Governance Review

Meeting Date: Monday, 28th September 2026

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to update councillors on the progress of a Community Governance Review incorporating Witney's boundaries.

Background

The Town Council last considered a Community Governance Review (CGR) for Witney between November 2025 and February 2026. At the request of the Community Governance Review Working Party, a second formal request was made to West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) for a review to be undertaken.

At its meeting on 16 February 2026, Full Council considered WODC's response, which advised that a district-wide CGR would be considered following a decision on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which was expected in the summer.

In response, the Town Council resolved to continue to press for a CGR to be undertaken as soon as possible following the Government's announcement. (Minute No. 108 refers).

Current Situation

A decision on LGR for Oxfordshire was announced by the Government on 16 July 2026. The decision proposed the creation of three new unitary authorities, including a 'Northern Oxfordshire Council' covering West Oxfordshire and most of the existing Cherwell District.

However, on 7 September 2026, the Government announced that it would review its LGR decisions across England, resulting in the process for Oxfordshire being paused. The outcome and timescale of the review are currently awaited.

At its meeting on 16 September 2026, West Oxfordshire District Council considered the implications of the LGR review and supported a review of town and parish council boundaries, with the aim of strengthening local representation. The Council made the following statement:

The first stage will invite Carterton, Chipping Norton, and Witney town councils, together with neighbouring parish councils and parish meetings, to put forward proposals. Options will then be developed with input from local councillors before returning to Full Council for consideration.

Public consultation will then be undertaken on the proposals, giving residents and other interested organisations an opportunity to comment before final recommendations are prepared.

The review will also consider any resulting implications for town council wards and the number of councillors on affected town and parish councils. It is focused on the three town areas and their neighbouring parishes, rather than a district-wide review.

The decision starts the review process; it does not approve any changes to boundaries. Depending on the timing of local government reorganisation, final decisions may be taken by West Oxfordshire District Council or a successor unitary council

The indicative timetable anticipates final recommendations being considered by March 2028. These timings remain subject to the review process, subsequent decisions, and arrangements for local government reorganisation.

The District Council report may be seen here [CGR Report Council Sept 2026.pdf](#)

The Town Council has already undertaken considerable work in developing its case studies and has previously engaged with neighbouring town and parish councils on this matter.

However, given that approximately a year has now passed, it would be prudent to review and update the existing case studies and any relevant information in preparation for further discussions with West Oxfordshire District Council.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

1. A Forward-Looking Town Council

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** – The Community Governance Review provides an opportunity to ensure that future governance arrangements are inclusive and accessible to all residents, with consideration given to the needs and representation of different groups and communities within and around Witney. Engagement should be designed to enable all affected residents to participate, including those who may face barriers to accessing or responding to the review.
- b) **Biodiversity** – Any changes to boundaries should have regard to local environmental interests and could provide opportunities for stronger community engagement in the protection and enhancement of local green spaces and biodiversity.

- c) **Crime & Disorder** – Effective community engagement and representation may support stronger local partnership working and ensure that community safety concerns are identified and reflected in future local governance arrangements.
- d) **Environment & Climate Emergency** – The review may provide opportunities to strengthen community engagement on environmental protection, climate action, and the management of local green spaces.

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.

Failure to prepare adequately for a Community Governance Review could limit the Town Council's ability to provide timely, evidence-based representations and effectively protect local interests.

The main risks are reduced influence over proposed governance changes, insufficient evidence to support the Council's position, and potential reputational concerns. Early preparation and clear engagement arrangements would help mitigate these risks.

Social Value

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

The review provides an opportunity to strengthen local identity, representation, and communities by ensuring that future governance arrangements reflect the needs and interests of residents across the wider Witney area.

Engagement with residents and communities in areas the Town Council would like included within the Witney boundary would help ensure their views, needs and local connections are properly understood and considered as part of the review.

Financial implications

- There are no direct financial implications pertaining to this report.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and:

1. Welcome and acknowledge the decision taken by West Oxfordshire District Council in relation to a Community Governance Review for Witney.
2. Convene a meeting of the Community Governance Review Working Party during October/November to review Case Studies and any further work required as part of this project.
3. Consider delegation on the CGR to the above Working Party to progress and report to this Committee/Council as and when appropriate.