POETS
Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably

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Will we get a Thames Valley mayor and what would they do?

Oxfordshire MPs asked for help in clarifying local government changes

Local think tank POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) has contacted all 7 Oxfordshire MPs to ask them to help clarify what the Government intends to do about a mayoral authority for the county.

Local government re-organisation is already underway, with existing councils expected to submit proposals later this month for a new unitary structure combining the work of the County, District & City councils. However, the Government is also proposing to establish a new overlying layer of mayoral authorities, which suggests that there will continue to be two tiers of local/sub-regional government. **Our local authorities are currently deciding whether to endorse an Expression of Interest in a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority.**

Chris Cousins from POETS said: "Discussion about how about local councils re-organise is pretty pointless without information on the proposed mayoral authorities. There currently appear to be no clear proposals as to the division of powers or what geographical area the mayoral authority might cover, although it is likely that Oxfordshire would be swept up in this Thames Valley region. **We are asking our local MPs for help in understanding what the objectives of these changes are, how responsibilities will be divided and how the public will be consulted**."

For example, which authorities would:
- decide where major housing and employment development would be located?
- plan and maintain transport infrastructure?
- coordinate social care with primary health care?
- define Green Belt boundaries?
- define areas where biodiversity protection and recovery should be paramount?

Chris Cousins said: "We believe there must be an understanding of how representation on the mayoral authority/regional assembly will be determined, and what its powers will be, before any decisions on the structure of local unitary councils are taken. We are also looking for reassurance that there will be a full public consultation on any proposals."

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Notes to Editors

1. The proposed Expression of Interest in a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority is available here: Agenda for Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee, Tues 25 Nov - see Agenda Item 5, Devolution. Endorsement of the paper has been or is being considered individually by each local authority.

2. Unitary proposals from existing councils are to be submitted to the Government by 28 November 2025 with a likely decision in 2026, followed by implementation in 2028. So far, there are three different Unitary Council proposals being put forward for this area:
   - Oxfordshire County Council proposes **one unitary authority** for the whole county
   - Five district councils have backed a "**Two Area" solution** covering Oxfordshire as well as West Berkshire. The Vale of White Horse would join with South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, while West Oxfordshire, Cherwell and Oxford City would form the other unitary authority.
   - Oxford City Council proposes **three authorities** for the same area, including an expanded **"Greater Oxford"** which includes parts of Cherwell, Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire, but none of West Oxfordshire.

   POETS' analysis of these proposals - ***Local Authority Proposals for Unitary Local Government in Oxfordshire*** – is available at https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/reports.html

3. POETS are a voluntary think tank of professionals providing analysis, commentary and ideas on sustainable planning and transport for Oxfordshire

   Further info, incl. POETS Vision for Oxfordshire, available here: www.poetsplanningoxon.uk

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