POETS
Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably

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Financial shocks and council tax rises could follow proposed re-organisation of Oxfordshire Councils

Local thinktank POETS is warning that current proposals for local government re-organisation in Oxfordshire may not have given enough consideration to the financial implications.

The Government has recently confirmed it is minded to go ahead with a three council option for Oxfordshire. This would disband all existing Oxfordshire councils and see them replaced with new unitary councils for an expanded Greater Oxford, plus Ridgeway (covering most of South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Berkshire) and Northern Oxfordshire (covering most of Cherwell and West Oxfordshire).

POETS member Professor John Glasson said: "The three authority proposal is likely to lead to more fragmentation and duplication of the provision of vital local services such as adult social care and SEND[1]. There will be major financial challenges and potentially substantial deficits, which could leave local residents to pick up the bill with considerable hikes in Council Tax. In the middle of existing cost of living pressures this would be an extra and unnecessary economic burden for local people."

"We have asked the Ministry of Housing and Local Government what advice they received on this issue from other departments, including the Treasury, Health and Education. Meanwhile, we have also submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Treasury asking for sight of any information or advice that was provided."

The re-organisation of the councils is set to happen at the same time as the creation of a new Thames Valley Mayoral Authority and a Greater Oxford Development Corporation, with enormous potential for bureaucratic overlap, confusion and delay.

Professor Glasson said: "POETS' view is that, of the options on the table, only a single Oxfordshire wide unitary council makes sense in the context of the existing economic geography of the Oxford City region, travel to work patterns, population sizes and financial efficiencies."

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Notes for editors:

1. POETS are a voluntary think tank of professionals providing analysis, commentary and ideas on sustainable planning and transport for Oxfordshire.
   Further info, incl. our **Greater Oxford Development Corporation Briefing Paper** and our **Vision for Oxfordshire**: www.poetsplanningoxon.uk linkedin.com/company/poets

[1] Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

2. Latest Government announcement on local government re-organisation, 29 October: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/local-government-reorganisation-moves-forward-in-five-counties

3. Letter from Jim McMahon MP OBE, Minister for Local Government, Devolution & Regional Growth, to current Oxfordshire authorities, 29 October: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-minded-to-decision-letters-to-council-leaders

Contact

E: contact.poets@gmail.com