POETS
Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably

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New Oxfordshire-wide Unitary Council best option on table for local government changes

The City, District and County councils in Oxfordshire are set to be abolished by Government in 2028. In a report published today, local think tank POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) has reviewed the alternatives being proposed. Their conclusion is that, despite challenges with all the options, **a new Oxfordshire-wide unitary council makes most sense in terms of geography and least disruption to services.**

POETS' member Tracey Dow said: "The proposal for a Unitary Oxfordshire Council is the simplest and most pragmatic option.

"Over 80% of all council services are already Oxfordshire-run, so this would ensure greatest continuity and least duplication. For example, it should mean minimal disruption to existing county-wide social care provision, education and transport services.

"It would give a clear geographical identity reflecting the reality of Oxford as a City Region, with close links between the city and key employment sites such as at, Didcot, Harwell and Culham. It is likely that it would also be the least expensive of the options to establish and run."

POETS say the '**Two Area' proposal** (The Vale of White Horse joining with South Oxfordshire and West Berkshire, while West Oxfordshire, Cherwell and Oxford City form the other unitary authority) makes less geographical sense.

Oxford would be located at the southern extreme of North Oxfordshire, and areas close to the city in the South would be disconnected from it in administrative terms, making service and infrastructure provision more difficult.

The **'Three Area' proposal, including 'Greater Oxford'**, is seen by POETS as the most disruptive and therefore likely to be the most expensive of the options. It is also based on some very aggressive growth targets, with little evidence of how supporting infrastructure could be developed to keep pace.

Tracey Dow said: "Oxford City's ambition is that the population of Greater Oxford would grow from 240,000 in 2025, to 345,000 in 2040 – an increase of 43%, or 2.9% per year. This would put overwhelming pressure on already creaking infrastructure, including transport, health and water, and make significant loss of the Green Belt almost inevitable. The proposal also confuses acceptable future local and strategic governance solutions with the policy decisions of councils yet to be elected, the political make-up of which is not known. "

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

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Notes to Editors

1. 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.

2. 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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