

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS APRIL 2025

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION AND DEVOLUTION

Councils across Oxfordshire have agreed a reply to a government request for interim proposals on the shape of local government reorganisation in the county – with OCC strongly outlining its preferred option for a single county unitary council.

What are the options being submitted?

Each cabinet or executive endorsed a joint response to government that sets out how local authorities in our area are collaborating to develop proposals for new unitary structures. The response included information on each of the three options being developed for Oxfordshire, in line with the criteria set out in the government's statutory invitation.

The options are:

A single county unitary council for Oxfordshire – Oxfordshire Council. This is the preferred option of OCC.

North Oxfordshire Council (created from the existing district councils of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire) and Ridgeway Council (created from the existing district councils of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse and the unitary council of West Berkshire).

Three unitary authorities – with a unitary city on expanded boundaries as well as northern and southern unitaries, also including West Berkshire.

Further detailed discussions will take place between the councils so that final proposals can be submitted by 28 November 2025. The government will then decide what form unitarisation will take in Oxfordshire.

In parallel, all Oxfordshire councils, with other partners, will continue collaborating to propose a mayoral strategic authority to government as part of the national programme of devolution.

LOCAL AUTHORITY OF SANCTUARY ACCREDITATION CONFIRMED FOR OCC

OCC is the first county council to be awarded local authority of sanctuary status, underpinning its commitment to supporting people fleeing war, persecution and serious human rights violations. The accreditation has been awarded by the [City of Sanctuary UK](#) movement following assessment by a panel of experts on migration.

NEURODIVERSITY CELEBRATION WEEK

A case study can be viewed on the OCC website here:

<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/neurodiversity-celebration-week-smashing-employment-barriers-with-resilience-and-determination/>

OXFORDSHIRE COUPLE STAR IN LGBTQ+ ADOPTION AND FOSTERING WEEK

Details can be found on the OCC website here:

<https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshire-couple-star-in-lgbtq-adoption-and-fostering-week/>

REIMAGINING OXFORD'S STREETS

Residents, businesses and visitors are being invited to have their say on potential street improvements for the city centre and north Oxford. OCC is asking for feedback on ideas that have been developed, and inviting suggestions on new ones, for the future of the city's streets and squares as part of a Central Oxfordshire Movement and Place Framework project. The project aims to improve a number of public spaces, support a shift to more walking, cycling and public transport, and improve access to green spaces and water. It builds on the success of recent public realm transformations in Broad Street and Market Street, as well as ongoing improvement works on St Michael's Street. Details on the OCC website here: <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/reimagining-oxfords-streets/>

SURFACE DRESSING PROGRAMME TO BEGIN THIS MONTH

Some roads across Oxfordshire will be improved as part of a highway maintenance programme beginning this spring. Surface dressing involves applying bituminous emulsion onto the road as a binder. This is followed immediately by the application of chippings to dress the emulsion layer. Details on the OCC website here: <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/road-resurfacing-programme-to-begin/>

GRANTS ON OFFER TO HELP COMMUNITIES TACKLE FLOODING

Communities who want to carry out projects to reduce the impact of flooding can apply for grants of up to £25,000. Groups wishing to apply have until 18 April to register their expression of interest by emailing the flood management team on floodmanagement@oxfordshire.gov.uk

ENGAGING OXFORDSHIRE'S YOUTH IN LOCAL POLITICS WITH THE HELP OF PIZZA

Over a hundred young people joined local MPs and politicians to discuss the issues that matter most to them at three pizza and politics events held across the county. The events, part of Oxfordshire County Council's Future Generations Programme, are designed to help those aged 11 to 18 understand local democracy and encourage them to participate in politics.

RESIDENTS MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OXFORDSHIRE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Participants of OCC's first citizens' assembly on travel and transport presented their 20 recommendations to council decision makers on Sunday 16 March, at the assembly's final session. OCC's Cabinet agreed how these recommendations will be responded to at its meeting on Tuesday 25 March. Assembly participants were selected by a randomised sortition process to broadly represent Oxfordshire residents. They came together to address the challenge question of: *"What steps do we need to take so Oxfordshire's transport system enables our county's health, economy, and environment to thrive in 2050?"* Thirty-four residents committed 45 hours of their time, including nine in-person discussion and engagement sessions at County Hall in Oxford, delivered by experts in deliberative democracy, MutualGain. A full report of the citizens' assembly and OCC's response to the assembly's recommendations will be considered by the council's Cabinet in July 2025. Subject to consent, it is hoped that the council can continue to work with assembly participants. The council will publish more detailed information on what the assembly covered, including evidence givers' presentations and films (where consent has been obtained), to coincide with the publication of the final report of the assembly in July 2025. More information about the assembly is available on the council's website at oxfordshire.gov.uk/CitizensAssembly