

District Report to Grove Parish Council 25 February 2025

English Devolution White Paper

This was the main topic of a special full council meeting on 19th February 2025. The agenda and cabinet report can be seen on the district website. The meeting noted the report.

Oxfordshire is not part of the Devolution Priority Programme. This means that elections will take place as normal in May.

The Leaders of Oxfordshire County Council, Vale of White Horse, and South Oxfordshire have all publicly indicated a preference to move forward with a proposal for a Mayoral Strategic Authority based on the geography of Oxfordshire, the 'Berkshire' unitary authorities and Buckinghamshire, However Buckinghamshire have not been party to the collective discussions and so an initial move forward based on Oxfordshire and 'the Berkshires' may be explored.

The majority of Oxfordshire Leaders believe that the development of a Strategic Authority and new unitary structures should be delivered together, to maximise any benefits for residents and reduce uncertainty by shortening the period of inevitable disruption to delivery that such major structural change represents.

The government wants initial responses on the form of the new unitary authorities by 21st March. Our response will be discussed by cabinet on 19th March. Note that government will only deal directly with OCC, however OCC is working with the districts.

Final proposals are required by 28th November. Government wants the new unitary authority to be in place by May 2028. This would mean elections to a shadow council in May 2027.

Various options for the new unitary authority are being considered. One option is to merge VOWH SODC with the West Berkshire unitary. Another option is a unitary council of all Oxfordshire. The shadow council will determine the budget, structure, senior officer appointments and approach to localisation of delivery of the new Council. The shadow council members will need to do so within the context of the new unitary most likely coming into existence alongside the functions and responsibilities of a new Strategic Authority, or shortly before it.

The direct effect of the changes to parish councils should be minimal. However senior officers will be heavily involved with the reorganisation and will only be able to deal with statutory duties. Long term planning will be on hold until a shadow council is in place. It is important that the changes happen as quickly as possible.

Joint Housing Allocations Policy

The Joint Housing Allocations Policy sets out the criteria to join the housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated. This is being updated and is available for consultation. Go to the website for further details or contact me.

Garden Waste Permits

The new payments system for our garden waste service permits will be released during the week commencing 24 February.

During the initial payment launch, telephone lines will be very busy, it will be easier to get permits online. You can also sign up for an online account to make renewing easier in April 2026. All current customers will receive a bin hanger promoting the new permits from 3 March. For More information see [South Garden Waste FAQ](#) / [Vale Garden Waste FAQ](#) – these pages, and the garden waste section will be updated post-launch.

District and Parish Councillor R Batstone
Grove North Ward