

Independent review of unitary options

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council had proposed working together with Oxfordshire's city and district councils on a single, independently commissioned review to consider all options for local government reorganisation in the county.

However we have had no response to this suggestion from other councils and understand that they have indicated an intention to commission a separate piece of work that we have not seen nor have been involved in developing. We regret that this is the case.

The County Council's political group leaders have agreed that, in the interests of Oxfordshire's residents, it is important to ensure that all options are fully considered. Therefore the county council intends to make the necessary arrangements for a full comprehensive and independent review and are anxious to involve all partners in this.

It is proposed that an independent report should be commissioned from a respected management body to identify and to review all options for local government structures in Oxfordshire.

Outline scope of the independent review

The scope for this work would be to consider the best model for the provision of local government services for Oxfordshire's residents.

This will include giving consideration to:

- Service delivery (both universal services and services for the most vulnerable residents. This will include all existing county and district council statutory functions, and also consider effective service commissioning and how best to deliver services partnership with other organisations)
- Driving economic growth
- Delivering the best value for money for tax payers
- The financial viability of future authorities, including the need to deliver financial savings and address new funding regimes and challenges facing the sector - eg fiscal devolution through business rate retention, health and social care integration
- Community engagement models (principles of subsidiarity, local decision making and community empowerment)
- Democratic accountability
- Addressing and reducing inequalities for residents
- Ensuring that the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults is managed effectively

The report will be put into the public domain for consideration by residents and partner organisations.

An advisory board of partner organisations, stakeholders and residents will be established to drive this work and consider the report's findings.

This invitation is also extended to our City and District colleagues as it makes no sense to have competing and separate studies paid for out of taxpayers' pockets. We would hope that all public bodies would play a full part in contributing essential information into this study.