

District Councillor Report – Cllr Sam Casey-Rerhaye, July 2025

Local government Reorganisation

All three options for Local Government Reorganisation are now being promoted by their proponents, with engagement now under way.

SODC have launched public engagement for their two-unitary council proposal, via **twocouncils.org** as well as printed materials and events. At the time of writing, the council have had over 1,346 responses to the survey, which runs until 16th July.

The SODC proposal, supported by all four rural districts, seeks to create two brand new unitary councils that cover the following areas:

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

Oxford City Council's "Greater Oxford" proposal

In contrast, Oxford City Council have launched their alternative '**Greater Oxford**' proposal to considerable publicity. This would mean most of the villages in the green belt, such as Dorchester, becoming part of a new 'Greater Oxford' council.

Their pitch for this is at <https://greateroxford.org>. It does not meet the government's stated criteria for size and it's unclear how some services would be provided. The city's online survey can be found on **Oxford City Council's engagement portal**.

The city council is holding public drop-in events in our area – including one in Berinsfield. We're trying to spread the word to ensure everyone is aware of the proposal and so the city council gets lots of engagement.

- The Berin Centre in Berinsfield between 10am and 1pm on 16th July. Also, Berro Lounge in Didcot between 4pm and 7pm on 29th July

Meanwhile, the County Council is pitching an **all-Oxfordshire version** which would be on the existing county boundaries. They have launched their engagement at <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/local-government-reorganisation>

The timeline for decisions

- **Friday 21st March, 2025** – local councils were asked to submit initial proposals to the Government so they could comment on them to help build the final proposals
- **Spring/Summer 2025** – further development work on the proposals along with a programme of communication and engagement to ensure local voices and community needs are reflected in the proposal
- **Friday 28th November 2025** – the deadline for final proposals to be submitted to the Government
- **Spring 2026** – It is expected the government will make their decision on which structure will be put in place for Oxfordshire. We have not been given a date yet.

Changes to Government Neighbourhood Planning Support

The Government has confirmed it will no longer provide national grant funding or technical support packages for neighbourhood planning groups beyond 2025.

This change means that community groups will no longer be able to access funding or specialist advice through the national provider, Locality.

Despite these national changes, **South Oxfordshire District Council remains committed to supporting neighbourhood planning**, with a dedicated in-house team which will continue to provide expert advice and guidance to neighbourhood planning groups. More info on the [council website](#).

Performing Arts grant coming soon

A new round of the £60,000 Performing Arts grant scheme will open for applications on 28th July. The scheme supports voluntary and community performing arts organisations in South Oxfordshire, who will be able to apply for up to £5,000 in funding for projects that improve community wellbeing across the district.

The council is holding a **funding advice event** at Cornerstone Arts Centre from 4pm – 6pm on Wednesday 9th July. There are limited spaces available, and places must be booked in advance.

SODC Capital Grant Scheme open for applications up to £75,000 until 25th July

Organisations eligible to apply are:

- Town and parish councils

- Non-profit businesses and Community Interest Companies
- Community-based organisations

More information can be found about all grants at southoxon.gov.uk/grants

Supporting Culture & the Arts

Last week, we hosted a successful Heritage Network event at the Abbey Buildings in Abingdon – launched to help local arts, culture and heritage to thrive, linking the groups and organisations who need support with those who have the ability to provide it.

Around 30 representatives from local museums, cultural organisations, and heritage sites across South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse attended. We hope this will become a regular event.

They heard from key organisations like The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Oxfordshire County Council, Museums Development Trust and Arts Council England about funding and future plans across the districts.

This event was a great opportunity for the sector and council representatives to make new connections helping the heritage community find access to the support they need in both districts.

Improvements for Abbey Sports centre

South Oxfordshire District Council has been successful in its bid for government funding of around £1.5m towards installing energy efficiency measures including double glazing and insulation, as well as solar panels and air source heat pumps to replace end-of-life gas boilers at the leisure centres in Berinsfield and Henley.

The owners of the buildings, Oxfordshire County Council, will put in £2m towards the improvements, while the district council will fund a further £2.8m from developer contributions. All work should be finished by the end of March 2028.

Upgraded IT project work at the council

The work to migrate Council IT systems from Capita to an in-house managed Cloud platform has now been completed.

This involved a large number of business-critical systems, including those supporting teams in planning, environmental services, private sector housing, community safety and land charges.

This essential work was required due to the termination of the costly and outdated Capita contract and to provide future-proofing for Council systems irrespective of the future structure of local government.

The disruption during this transition period lasted longer than anticipated, and the Councils are grateful to all users for their forbearance while the work was completed.

However, the Planning system proved to be particularly problematic and it is still facing some integration problems.

The Planning Team is now working through a backlog of 500 planning applications and 50 enforcement cases so apologises in advance for any delays in responding to any requests.

If you have any questions or issues you would like to contact me about:

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Or leave a message for me on 01235 635566.