

# Two Councils

Oxford and Shires | Ridgeway

A once-in-a-generation opportunity  
Two new councils. One better future.

# Two Councils

Oxford and Shires | Ridgeway

## A proposal for two new unitary councils

Change is coming to the way councils work across the country, and we are taking the opportunity to make sure it's done in a way that truly benefits our communities.

The government has invited proposals for **new unitary councils** in areas like Oxfordshire where there are currently two tiers of local government (district and county councils). It has also indicated that smaller existing unitary councils like West Berkshire should reorganise so they cover areas of around **500,000** people.



# Two Councils

## Oxford and Shires | Ridgeway

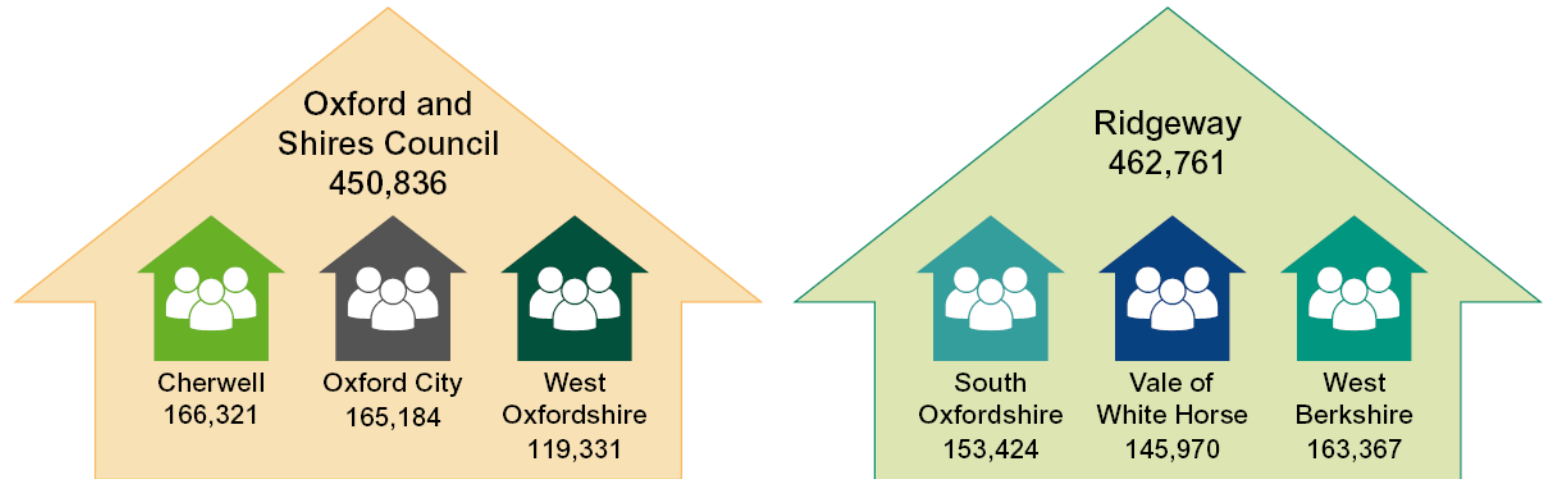
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We propose to answer the government's request by creating two new unitary councils that cover the following areas:

- **Oxford and Shires 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.

*Note that these are just working titles for now and might change.*

The population figures below show where we are now and what our proposal would provide in relation to the numbers the government is aiming for.





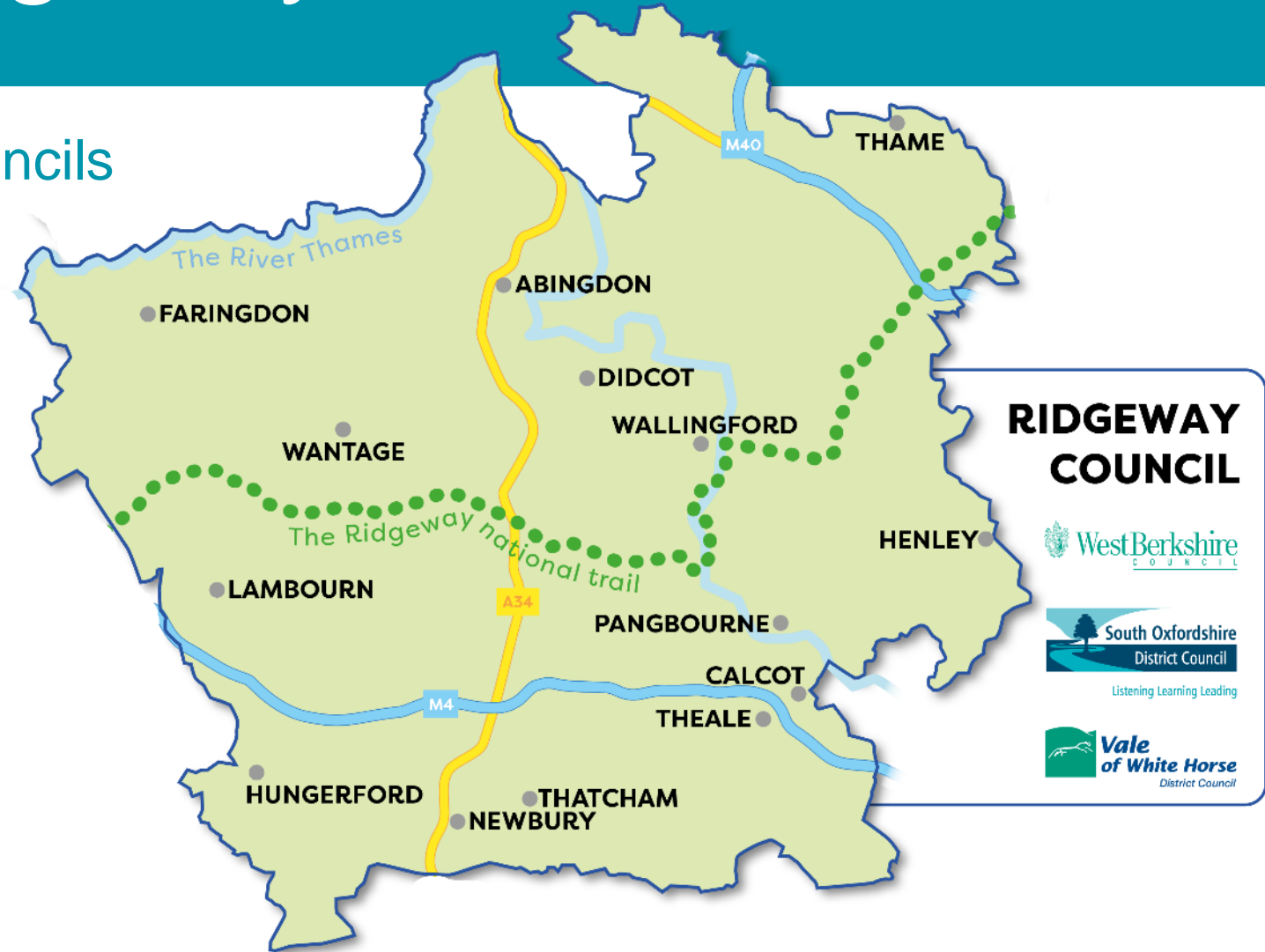
# Get ready for Ridgeway

## A proposal for two new unitary councils

Ridgeway Council is our proposed new unitary council covering the districts of West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.

The three districts share strong demographic and economic similarities and significant historic ties. This is symbolised by the working title of 'Ridgeway' Council, named after the famous 5,000-year-old footpath that travels through the heart of our councils.

By building on these shared connections, 'Ridgeway Council' will provide a strong and effective foundation for the future.



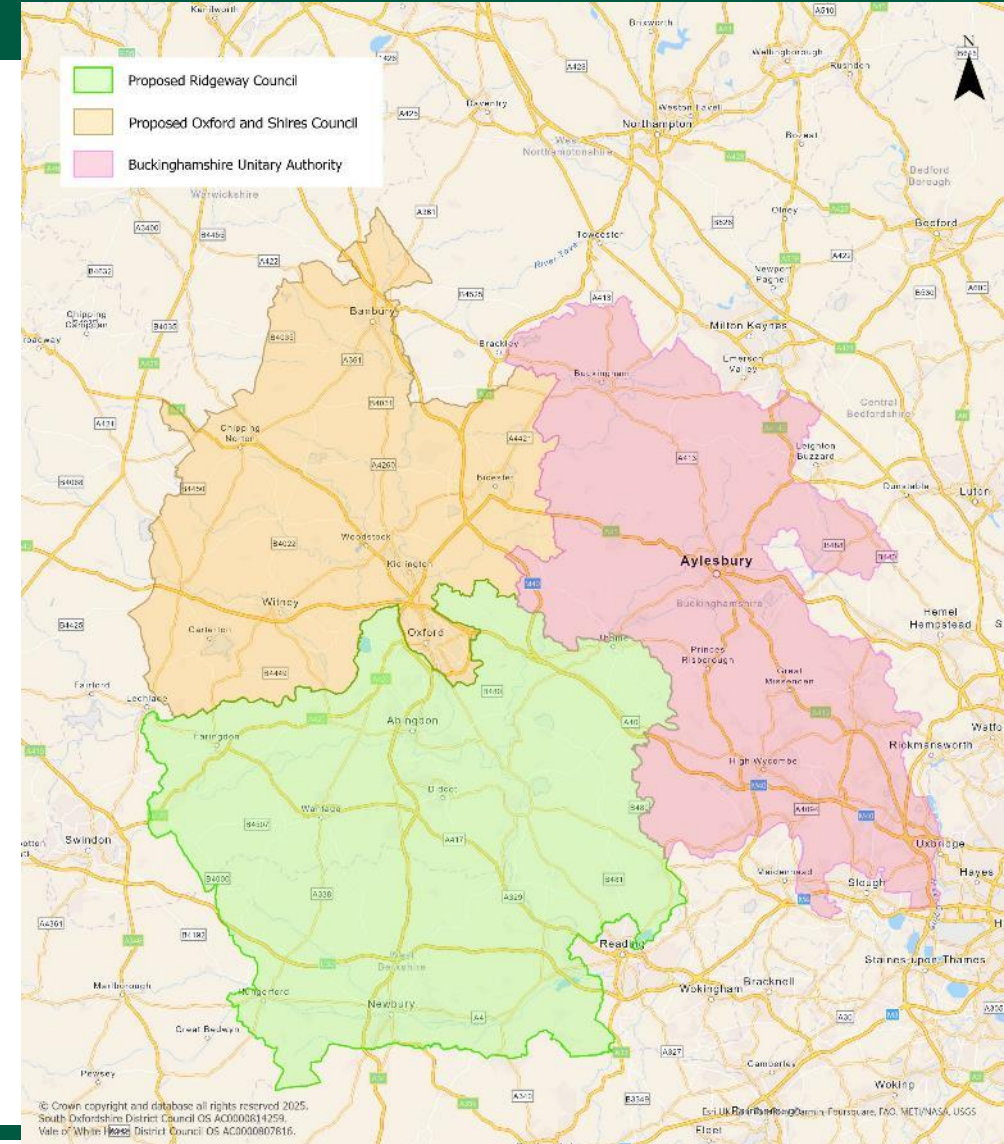
# A new strategic authority

## What is the proposed strategic authority

The government has also asked for areas to propose a large regional mayoral strategic authority, covering populations of at least 1.5 million, overseen by an elected mayor.

These new regional authorities will provide services like planning policy, strategic housing, health, nature recovery and economic development. A few already exist in places like the West Midlands and Greater Manchester. The remaining services will be provided by unitary councils.

Our preference is for a strategic authority that includes Oxfordshire and the Berkshire authorities, or a wider area incorporating Buckinghamshire, as these mirror the boundaries already used by the police and health authorities.

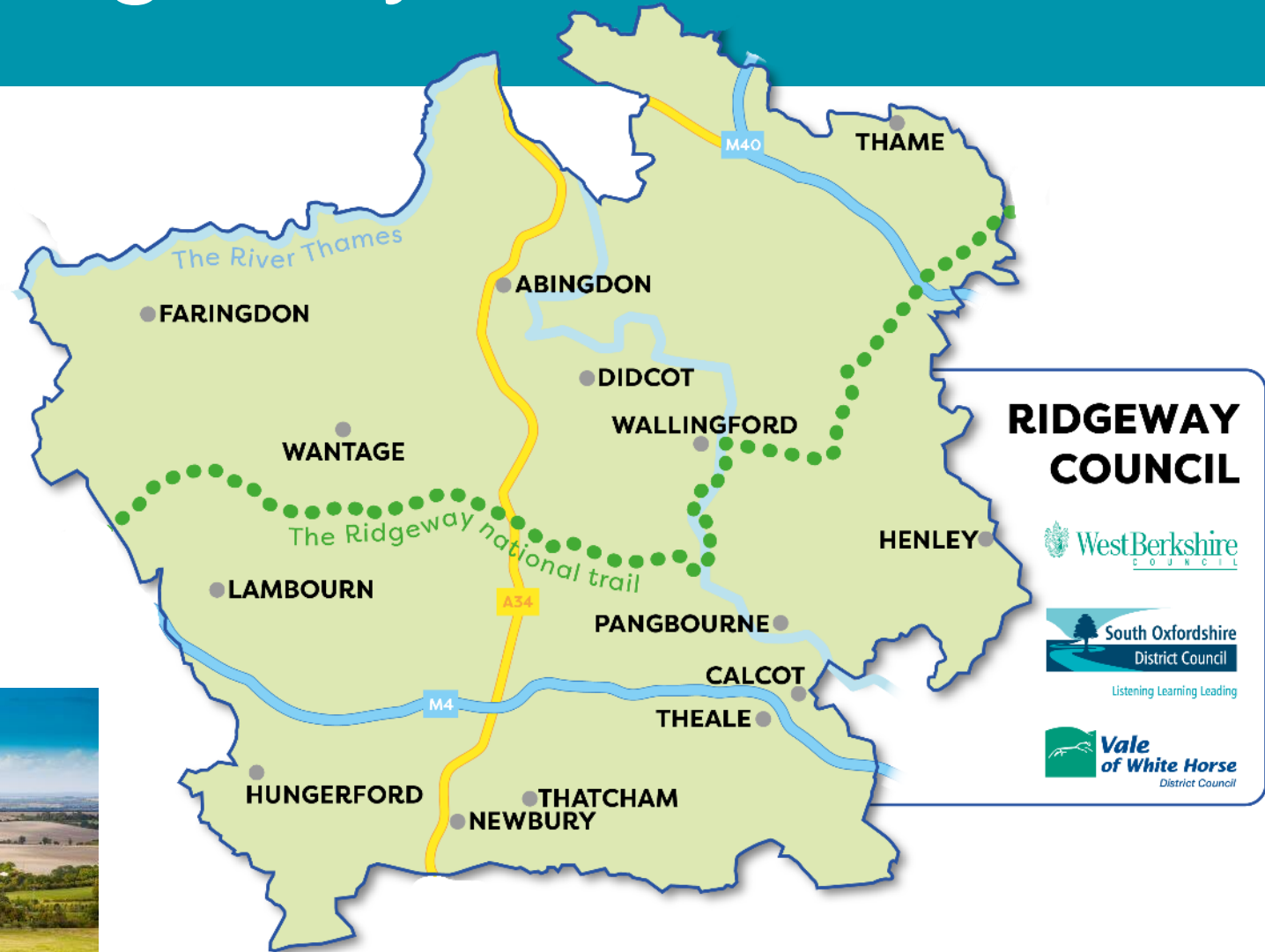


# Creating a new Ridgeway

## What is the geography?

We are proposing merging the boundary between South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Berkshire Council to create a new Ridgeway Council. The new council will be well-placed to maintain and enhance the unique character of our market towns and rural areas.

West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire, and the Vale of White Horse already share deep historical, economic, and geographic ties, symbolised by the working title of our proposed new council, named after the famous 5,000-year-old footpath that travels through the heart of our council areas.



# Your democracy

## Democracy

Our proposal aims to strengthen local democracy by ensuring decision-making remains close to the communities it affects. It would potentially mean a change for your local elected representatives.

With fewer, stronger councils, decisions can be made more effectively, but we also want to ensure that local voices continue to be heard and are fully represented.

**South Oxfordshire** currently has 36 district councillors and 15 county councillors,

**Vale of White Horse** currently has 38 district councillors and 14 county councillors,

**West Berkshire** has 43 councillors

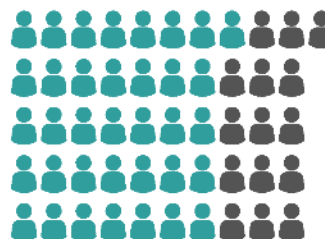
A combined total of 146 councillors.

The new **Ridgeway Council** would propose 80-90 councillors in total.

### South Oxfordshire

36 District Councillors

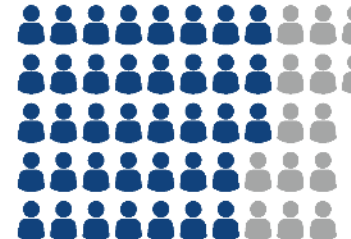
15 County Councillors



### Vale of White Horse

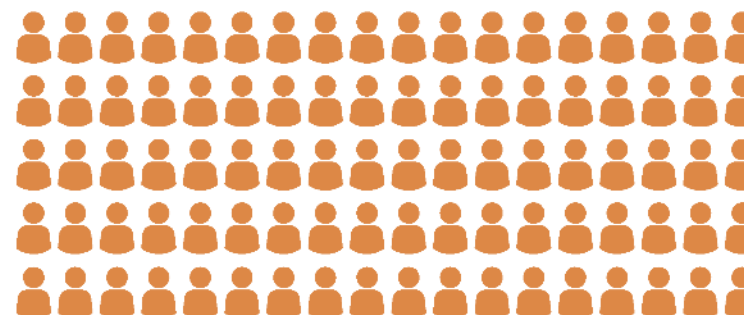
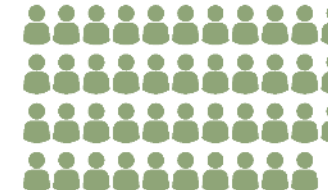
38 District Councillors

14 County Councillors



### West Berkshire

43 Councillors



### Ridgeway Council

80-90 Councillors



# Economy and finance

## Economy

Our areas are already linked by innovative businesses and ambitions for thriving towns and villages. The new Ridgeway Council has the potential to bring real economic growth to the area, enhance financial sustainability, provide value for money services and lay a strong and effective foundation for the future.

The new council will be well-placed to do all of this while maintaining and enhancing the unique character of our market towns and rural areas - a key driver for our local economy.





# Your services

## How we'd deliver better services for residents

We want to put people and communities at the heart of strong, healthy and robust local government. We want to support future housing and infrastructure needs and ensure lasting benefits for all those who call our area home.

Bringing all services under two unitary councils (as is proposed with Oxford and Shires Council and Ridgeway Council) would mean a simpler, more joined-up experience for residents. For example, the same council would manage your bins, roads, schools, and social care, leading to clearer accountability and easier access.

By combining two districts with an existing unitary council, our proposal won't need us to create new social care, highways, schools and education services – we will just need to rejig how these services currently work.





# Your services

## Your local community

We appreciate the importance of local community and how connected people feel. We want to make sure we are representing you, understanding where you live and looking after your interests and what matters most to you.

We are linked by shared communities and through ambitions for flourishing towns and villages. So, rather than decisions being determined by cities and large towns, we are taking the lead, with a council where every bit of public money is spent in our towns, villages and rural communities.

Together, we can create a council that works for today and is ready for tomorrow, a council that connects our communities, just as the Ridgeway has for thousands of years.

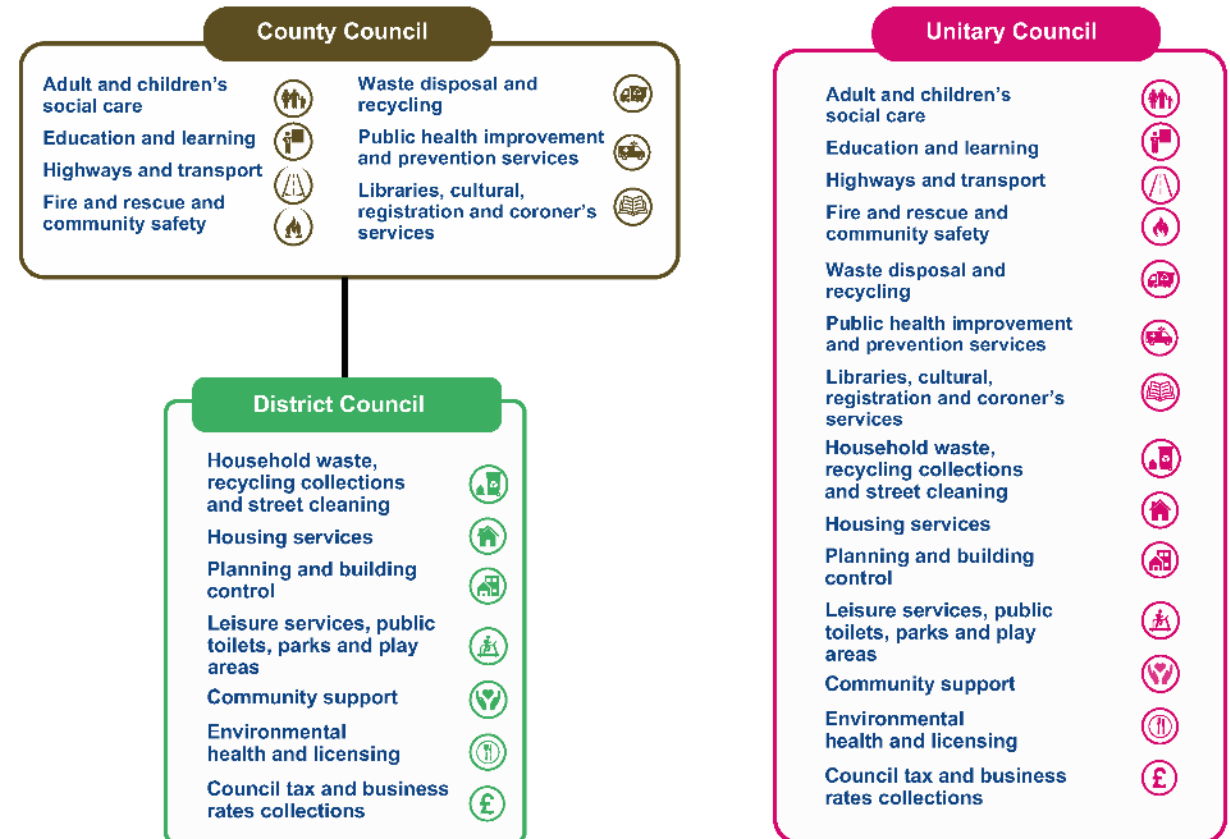


# Council structures

## What is the difference between the current councils and unitary councils?

The difference between a two-tier authority, comprising district and county councils, and a unitary council can be confusing. The diagram below outlines the responsibilities of each type of council. In a two-tier structure, services are divided between county and district councils, whereas a unitary council encompasses all services.

The changes will not affect parish and town councils structurally, and the government has no plans to change them. Towns and parish councils look after services such as allotments, some parks/play areas and community facilities.





# Oxford and Shires Council

## Oxford City, Cherwell and West Oxfordshire

The other half of our proposal for Ridgeway, is our twin council in the northern area of Oxfordshire. This would see Cherwell, West Oxfordshire and Oxford City, coming together to form one unitary council in the north of the county, complementing the proposed southern unitary Ridgeway Council.

Like Ridgeway, the new Oxford and Shires Council will be well-placed to build on the international brand of Oxford and drive economic growth across key towns while also protecting and supporting the rural communities in the area.

### Other proposals for this area

Alongside the Oxford and Shires Council and Ridgeway proposal, there are two other proposals being put forward:

- **A single unitary council for Oxfordshire** – being developed by Oxfordshire County Council.
- **A three-unitary option** – with a unitary city on expanded boundaries and northern and southern unitaries, and potentially West Berkshire, being developed by Oxford City Council.

