

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
For Housing and Local Government
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local
Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

By email

**The Leader's Office
Oxfordshire County Council
County Hall
New Road
Oxford
Oxfordshire
OX1 1ND**

Councillor Tim Bearder
Leader of the Council

7 September 2026

Dear Baroness Taylor

Thank you for meeting with me to discuss the Government's decision to proceed with three unitary authorities in Oxfordshire and West Berkshire. I found the meeting very useful, and I am grateful for the opportunity to put our concerns directly to you

As I explained, our concern is not simply about the number of councils. It is about whether the proposed arrangements will genuinely strengthen local government, preserve the benefits of operating at scale and enable Oxfordshire to play its full part in the growth of the Oxford-Cambridge corridor. I was grateful that you acknowledged the importance of Oxford's ability to grow and its contribution to the country's GDP.

I was particularly pleased that you recognised how undesirable it would be for Oxfordshire to have to resort to a Judicial Review simply to obtain the civil servants' advice underpinning this once-in-a-generation decision.

I have asked Martin Reeves, working in his role as the CEO of Oxfordshire County Council, to continue to liaise with the MHCLG team on my request for further underpinning rationale for the minded-to decision. And at the same time I continue to support Martin in his role as SRO for the system to ensure a safe and legal transition. We are proud and wish to remain one of the most collaborative systems in the country. This of course could be jeopardised and disrupted by unnecessary legal proceedings and as I said in the meeting, I would much rather we were able to resolve these questions constructively and without the considerable expense and delay that legal proceedings would entail.

I therefore look forward to receiving the further letter from Laura, sharing a copy of the advice and considerations that informed the Secretary of State's decision. I appreciate that there may be a range of factors involved, but I do think the people of Oxfordshire deserve a clear explanation of why this particular model was chosen, particularly given the Government's stated objectives of creating councils that are simpler, more financially resilient and better able to deliver high-quality services.

I hope that, with the benefit of further insight into the advice, we can continue a constructive dialogue about how best to make the new arrangements work for residents. I remain keen to work with you and your officials to ensure that the transition is as successful as possible.

Thank you again for your time, and I look forward to hearing from Laura.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Bearder', written in a cursive style.

CLlr Tim Bearder
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