

Local Government Reorganisation – Question responses from West Berkshire Council

In addition to the responses to the questions below, the full proposal document for the Two Councils unitary model has been published and provides detailed information on the Ridgeway Council and Oxford & Shires council model. You can [find the full proposal and appendices on the TwoCouncils.org website](https://www.twocouncils.org).

What is being done with the likely pressures on Theale Medical Centre as a result of the new housing developments in Theale, as well as the additional development sites that have been allocated by West Berkshire Council in Theale and Calcot as part of the local plan?

The proposal for a new Two Councils model recognises that population growth and new housing developments will increase demand on local health services, including GP practices like Theale Medical Centre. The new unitary councils will work closely with the NHS and Integrated Care Boards to ensure that infrastructure planning aligns with housing growth - just as West Berkshire Council does at the moment.

The proposed Ridgeway and Oxford and Shires two-unitary councils approach includes strategic planning for health and community infrastructure, with a focus on prevention, locality-based service delivery, and partnership with health providers. It also highlights the importance of aligning local plans and infrastructure investment to support sustainable growth and meet the needs of expanding communities.

What is being done to protect the non-statutory services that are currently provided by West Berkshire Council?

Both statutory and valued non-statutory services would be protected under this proposal. By achieving efficiencies through consolidation and transformation, the new councils aim to reinvest savings into frontline and community services, including non-statutory ones. There is a strong emphasis on locality working, community empowerment, and partnership with the voluntary sector to sustain and enhance non-statutory services such as cultural, arts, leisure, and community support. The phased implementation plan prioritises continuity of all essential services from day one.

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West Berkshire and Reading Borough Councils are already Unitary Authorities. And, the Government has stated that this figure of 500k people is only an 'aim' and not a set standard. So, why are proposals for this area being discussed?

The government invited Oxfordshire authorities to submit proposals for local government reorganisation, with the aim of creating more sustainable, efficient, and resilient councils. While the 500,000 population figure is a guideline, not a strict threshold, the proposal argues that two new unitary councils of similar size (around 470,000 - 480,000 each) will provide the right balance of efficiency, local accountability, and financial resilience. Including West Berkshire in the reorganisation addresses its current financial challenges and creates councils that are better able to withstand future pressures.

How will warding and councillor numbers change for Holybrook Residents (i.e., polling stations, number of District Councillors per area) under these proposals?

The proposal states that, for the Ridgeway authority (which includes West Berkshire), existing ward boundaries will be maintained initially, with no immediate boundary reviews required.

Local democracy for Oxford & Shires and Ridgeway councils will be strengthened by executive governance arrangements, providing strong political and strategic leadership in each of the two unitary councils.

Under unitary councils, communities will be clear who the elected representatives are and councillors will be supported to champion their local area.

There would initially be around 96 councillors across the Ridgeway Council area which is modelled on Government criteria that there should be fewer than 99 councillors per council. At the moment there are 142 county, unitary and district councillors. The future councillor numbers will be determined in consultation with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, aiming for effective representation and alignment with best practice in similar rural-urban areas. Whole council elections every

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four years are proposed, with a reduction in overall councillor numbers to improve efficiency while maintaining local accountability.

What would happen to any S106/Community Infrastructure Levy monies that was raised by development in Holybrook when the transfers take place?

The proposal indicates that all existing financial commitments, including S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds, will be honoured by the new councils. These funds will continue to be used for their intended purposes within the communities where they were raised, ensuring that infrastructure and community benefits are delivered as planned. The transition plan includes careful management of assets, liabilities, and ongoing commitments to ensure continuity.

What happens to long-term contracts, such as grass cutting and bin emptying, if the proposal is accepted?

Long-term contracts for services like grounds maintenance and waste collection will be reviewed and managed as part of the transition. The new councils will honour existing contracts and ensure continuity of service. Over time, contracts may be consolidated or re-procured to achieve efficiencies and improve service delivery, but there will be no disruption to residents during the transition. There will be detailed planning for contract management and service integration.

Will school catchment areas/admission policies etc change for Holybrook Pupils?

The proposal does not envisage immediate changes to school catchment areas or admission policies as a result of reorganisation. Any future changes would be subject to statutory consultation and would be designed to reflect local needs and ensure fair access to education. The new councils will work closely with schools and communities to manage any necessary adjustments, with a focus on stability and continuity for pupils and families.

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The cost of being a Reading resident is typically higher than that of being a West Berkshire resident. And, being a resident of the Vale of White Horse is typically higher than that of being a West Berkshire resident. What formal guarantees on council tax rises, for example, will be written into any boundary change?

The proposal states that council tax harmonisation will be managed carefully, using a weighted average approach to set Band D rates for the new councils. This method avoids sudden increases for residents and aligns with government referendum limits on council tax rises. Any changes will be subject to statutory limits and local decision-making by the new councils.

What does your authority gain from your proposals?

West Berkshire Council gains a more sustainable and resilient model for local government, with improved financial stability, greater efficiency, and the ability to reinvest savings into frontline services. The new structure enhances local accountability, strengthens community engagement, and provides a stronger platform for economic growth, infrastructure investment, and partnership working. It also addresses current financial challenges and positions the area for future devolution opportunities.

Is your council able to provide a full financial model and impact assessment for Holybrook, including council tax modelling?

Yes, the proposal includes a detailed financial case, with modelling of income, expenditure, council tax, and the impact of transition and transformation. The financial analysis has been independently reviewed and includes projections for the new councils, including the Ridgeway area (which covers Holybrook). Council tax modelling uses a weighted average approach to ensure fairness and compliance with statutory limits. The [proposal is available to read here](#).