

Liz Leffman
Council Leader
Oxfordshire County Council

**Councillor David Rouane
Leader of the Council**

David.Rouane@southoxon.gov.uk

By email only

Liz.Leffman@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01235 422422
Abbey House
Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

Thursday 19 December 2024

Dear Liz,

I write to ask that as County Council Leader, you make formal contact with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government as soon as possible, expressing a strong view that they should support Oxfordshire to move forward quickly with the devolution and local government reorganisation agenda outlined within the English Devolution White Paper.

Government has suggested that the new strategic authorities should, where possible, align with existing cross council arrangements and so my strong preference for any future strategic authority footprint involving South Oxfordshire would be one that is based on the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board geography. However, I realise that this will need to be agreed by a wider range of partners and would welcome an update on the conversations I understand the County Council is having with Buckinghamshire. I realise that Government may have strong views on this matter, and that is one reason that I feel early, and sustained, engagement with Government is essential if residents in Oxfordshire are to be spared a long period of unnecessary uncertainty that would only undermine the intent of the White Paper.

In my view, the only way of achieving the stated aims of the White Paper across Oxfordshire and any Strategic Authority it is part of, is to ask Government to engage with us now, and to commit to working openly and supportively with us, and all relevant partners, at pace.

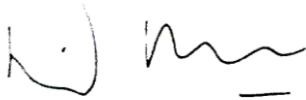
I am keen to ensure that we move to a position of structural certainty as early as possible, something that is vital in terms of meeting the needs of residents and businesses. It would do great harm to residents, business and to our staff, whose service delivery and enablement is vital to so many in our communities, were we not

to proceed at pace and instead experience a prolonged period of debate and potential disagreement within the public sector, which could be easily avoided through early resolution, and with the commitment of support from Government to achieve that.

South Oxfordshire is proud of the level of affordable housing, as one example, that is being delivered. Even more will be achieved once our Joint Local Plan has been adopted, but we all know that it is developers that build houses, and a protracted period of inward focused debate and potential disagreement amongst ourselves regarding structures is not an environment that brings confidence to them or to our world-renowned business community, such as the UK's national fusion laboratory at Culham. I am sure like so many others, they would also ask that now the White Paper is published, Government assist Oxfordshire and partners to move forward quickly, with purpose and with a clear expectation on when a new strategic authority, underpinned by all unitary structures, will be brought into being.

I will separately copy this letter to our MPs, Olly Glover and Freddie van Mierlo.

Yours sincerely



Cllr David Rouane
Leader of South Oxfordshire District Council

cc: Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, OCC
Mark Stone, Chief Executive, SODC