

Local Government Reorganisation

Update January 2026

Background

In December 2024, the government announced that two-tier councils (county and district) were to be abolished and replaced by unitary authorities, each providing services for a population of around 500,000 people. Initial proposals had to be submitted to the government by 21 March 2025, with final plans required by 28 November 2025.

The reorganisation was intended to simplify local councils by having new, larger councils running all local services. The first phase was focussed on replacing two-tier councils with unitary authorities.

Both West Berkshire Council (WBC) and Reading Borough Council (RBC) were already unitary authorities, although neither covered a large enough population, so neither was affected by phase one of the reorganisation. It should be noted that RBC is not currently parished.

Councils in Oxfordshire, however, were affected as its services were provided by six councils: Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council. These would have to be replaced by one or more new unitary authority/ies.

Although no Berkshire council was asked to submit reorganisation plans as part of phase one, WBC entered discussions with neighbouring councils in Oxfordshire and an initial proposal to combine West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse into a new "Ridgeway" Council was formed.

In March 2025, Oxfordshire submitted three proposals to the government, two of which included the new Ridgeway Council. However, its preferred option was for Oxfordshire Council to be a single unitary council covering the whole district.

In response to these initial proposals, RBC requested that, if the new Ridgeway Council was agreed, there should be a boundary change to move five electoral wards – Pangbourne, Theale, Tilehurst Birch Copse, Tilehurst & Purley, Tilehurst South & Holybrook (ie the parishes of Holybrook, Pangbourne, Purley on Thames, Theale, Tidmarsh with Sulham, Tilehurst) – to Reading. In November 2025, this proposal was revised to remove Pangbourne and Theale wards (ie Pangbourne, Tidmarsh with Sulham, and Theale parishes).

Final proposals were submitted to the government in November 2025 and are currently being reviewed.

Before any decisions can be made, statutory consultation of residents, businesses and stakeholders will be required. This is expected to take place in early 2026, after which the government will announce its decision.

There will then be a transition period as the new unitary authorities are set up; the new councils will potentially come into effect in April 2028.

Public engagement in parishes

In late summer/autumn 2025, various public meetings and drop-in sessions were held in the affected parishes.

Holybrook – following a parish-wide questionnaire, a public meeting attended by WBC and RBC, and a public drop-in session, Holybrook Parish Council sent a [representation letter to the Secretary of State](#).

Pangbourne – held public engagement meetings with WBC and RBC in September.

Purley on Thames – carried out an [online survey](#).

Theale – held public meetings with WBC and RBC. A parish poll was formally requested and was held on Thursday 6 November; 534 residents (24% of electorate) [voted to stay with West Berkshire Council](#).

Tidmarsh with Sulham – held a public meeting.

Tilehurst – held a public meeting on Monday 20 October, at which representatives from RBC and WBC gave presentations and answered questions. Around 50 members of the public attended (under 1% of electorate), and a [record of the meeting](#) is available on the web site.

Note: RBC removed the Theale and Pangbourne electoral wards (ie Pangbourne, Theale and Tidmarsh with Sulham parishes) from its proposal in November 2025.

Further options available to Tilehurst Parish Council

Other affected parish councils have undertaken a residents' survey/questionnaire or a parish poll and consideration has been given to doing this in Tilehurst.

Residents' survey/questionnaire

To ensure all parish residents had the opportunity to respond, it would need to be produced in hard copy and hand-delivered to all dwellings within the parish. Based on the recent distribution of the parish newsletter, the estimated cost of printing and distribution would be around £2,000. Additional resource would also be needed to deliver surveys to those addresses not covered by third-party distributors (600 to 700 houses).

Parish poll

Must be requested and agreed in a meeting of parish residents. Those attending the meeting must also agree the exact wording of the poll question. There may be only one question and it must be phrased for a Yes/No answer. There are specific legal requirements to be met when holding a parish meeting and poll, and all costs must be met by the parish council. It is estimated that the cost of a poll in the parish of Tilehurst would be around £4,000-£5,000.

Going forward

At its meeting on Tuesday 13 January 2026, Tilehurst Parish Council considered whether having a residents' survey/questionnaire or parish poll would be the best way to support residents at this time. It was agreed that:

- the costs of a survey/questionnaire or poll would be fairly high;
- timing of a parish poll would be likely to conflict/coincide with the government's statutory consultation;
- response rates and voter turnout were relatively low in other parishes and there is no reason to expect this to be different in Tilehurst, so results were unlikely to be fully representative of the parish; and
- results of a poll or survey/questionnaire would be advisory only and not binding on any of the authorities involved, including the government.

Overall, the Parish Council agreed it would be preferable to await details of the government consultation and then to discuss how to support residents by helping them complete and submit their responses.

Once details of the government consultation are known, councillor surgeries might be held in various locations around the parish to enable residents to discuss the issues and consider how best to make a response. Attendees might also be invited to complete a short survey which would help the Parish Council when it prepared its own consultation response.

The Parish Council might also consider calling another public meeting to discuss the consultation and to seek residents' views. At the same time, any additional information made available to the Parish Council would be shared (so far, the Parish Council has had access only to information in the public domain and accessible to all residents).