

The Rt Hon Jim McMahon OBE MP
Minister for Local Government, Devolution and
Regional Growth
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Via email

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Dear Minister,

Thank you for the clarity provided following your meeting with local authority leaders on 21 October regarding proposals for a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority. While I was disappointed not to be able to attend on behalf of my Council, I welcome the greater certainty now being provided by Government regarding its preferred geography and the next steps in the devolution process.

Vale of White Horse District Council has consistently supported the principle of devolution. We believe that decisions affecting our communities should be taken as close to those communities as possible, and we recognise the opportunities that greater local control over investment, infrastructure, housing, skills and economic development could bring for residents and businesses across our area.

As discussions have progressed, the principal area of debate has been geography. My preference has been for a Thames Valley footprint encompassing Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, reflecting the strong economic, institutional and public service links that have developed over many years. While Buckinghamshire has taken a different view regarding participation in the proposed arrangements, I remain hopeful that opportunities for future collaboration across the wider Thames Valley will continue to develop.

That said, the inclusion of Swindon within the Government's preferred geography raises important practical considerations, particularly given existing differences in service boundaries and strategic partnerships. Adding Swindon into, and removing Buckinghamshire from, existing public sector service geographies like healthcare and policing will be a huge challenge.

I would like to place on record however, that I recognise and value the significant role that Swindon has in supporting and bringing benefits to the west of my district, particularly given the unique cultural and economic offer it brings to our area.

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Now that Government has provided clarity regarding its preferred geography, I am committed to working constructively with neighbouring authorities and partners to ensure that this next phase of the process is productive and positive for the region as a whole.

In particular, I hope there will be opportunities to consider how existing public service boundaries can be better aligned over time to support the objectives of devolution and to serve our residents effectively. One example is the current position regarding Integrated Care Board boundaries, where parts of Oxfordshire sit outside the Thames Valley footprint. If future boundary reviews or realignments are anticipated, I would welcome consideration of how these arrangements can best support coherent service delivery and improve outcomes for residents.

I would also encourage Government to recognise the diversity of communities across the proposed Mayoral Strategic Authority area. The Vale is a predominantly rural district with a strong farming sector, a thriving rural economy and nationally significant environmental assets. As governance arrangements develop, it will be important to ensure that the needs and opportunities of rural communities are given equal consideration alongside those of larger urban centres. Successful devolution should reflect and balance the interests of all communities across the region.

As this work progresses, I look forward to engaging with Government, neighbouring authorities and local stakeholders to build a robust evidence base, understand the potential benefits and challenges of the proposal, and ensure that residents have the opportunity to shape the future of governance in our area.

Devolution also presents an opportunity to unlock investment and strengthen delivery in areas that matter most to our residents and businesses. For the Vale, this includes improving transport and infrastructure connections, supporting innovation and high-value employment through our internationally significant science and technology sector, improving skills and workforce development, increasing the delivery of affordable homes, strengthening rural connectivity, and helping communities transition towards a net zero future. I hope a future strategic authority will provide the powers, investment and local flexibility needed to accelerate progress in these areas while reflecting the distinct needs of communities across the region.

I remain committed to working constructively with Government and our regional partners to ensure that any future arrangements are ambitious, deliverable, financially sustainable and grounded in the needs of the communities they are intended to serve.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Bethia Thomas
Leader of the Council