

OFFICIAL

Hi Angharad,

Welcome to the South East!

It would be very useful to schedule some future catch ups with you if that were possible? One of the key things I would find it helpful to better understand post the general election is the approach that you feel will be taken to devolution and what the likely timescales could be, as it has long been an area of great interest for our members.

As you know, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are not part of the grouping of councils and others that have formed the Oxford/Cambridge pan-regional partnership (PRP). The position of both councils is that for us, the PRP is an additional layer that adds little or no value and is in fact a distraction from our efforts to deliver for our residents – indeed it seems to cause a degree of confusion based on local feedback, given we actually form part of the south-east region?

Our economy, housing market, residents and business do not naturally gravitate towards Cambridge/Cambridgeshire in the way that many seem to assume. Instead, many have key links that run to Reading, Swindon, across to Bristol and down through West Berkshire towards the south coast ports and associated life science clusters.

Equally, when it comes to the scale and most logical localised 'platform' for devolution our members have, since 2019, long been of the view that devolution should be focused on empowering the most efficient localised units of democratic geography. I believe they would see a population of around 300,000 (roughly the combined population of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse) as representing a suitable and desirable scale upon which devolution could successfully be built.

Clearly, there will be many diverse views on such subjects, but it will be important to our members that should any devolution conversations occur at either an Oxfordshire or Pan-Regional Partnership level, DLUHC officials are mindful that we are not members of the PRP and they do not represent our views. We would be grateful if you were able to offer reassurance that officials will do all they can to ensure that we are contacted directly around

any devolution or linked matters that might impact our councils or residents, to ensure that the voice of our members, and through them the voice of our residents and businesses, can be heard.

Kind regards,

Mark Stone (he/him/his)

Chief Executive

South Oxfordshire District Council and

Vale of White Horse District Council