

**Divisions- N/A**

**COUNTY COUNCIL – 30 June 2026**

**REPORT OF THE CABINET**

***Cabinet Member: Leader***

**1. Local Government Reorganisation in Oxfordshire: Statutory consultation response**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

Cabinet had before a report regarding the Council's draft responses to the Government statutory consultation on three proposals for local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire. These were, a single council for all Oxfordshire, two councils including West Berkshire, and three councils also including West Berkshire.

Cabinet reiterated the Council's preferred option for a single unitary authority for the whole of Oxfordshire.

Cabinet approved the submission of three consultation responses (Annex 1, 2 and 3) to the Ministry for Housing Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG)'s consultation on local government reorganisation (LGR) in Oxfordshire as requested by the Minister of State for Local Government's letter on 5 February 2026.

**2. Devolution Update - Thames Valley Strategic Authority**

*(Cabinet, 21 April 2026)*

Cabinet received an update on Thames Valley devolution, focusing on national policy changes and governance options.

Cabinet noted the invitation to submit an expression of interest (EOI) for foundation strategic authority status, ahead of possible mayoral strategic authority status. The EOI was submitted by the deadline, and further developments await clarification on governance and geography.

***Cabinet Member: Deputy Leader and Resources***

**3. Improving our Fire and Rescue Service**

*(Cabinet, 21 April 2026)*

Cabinet received a report on the results consultation on the proposed Fire and Rescue Service cover model. The report focused on proposals to enhance emergency response effectiveness, including changes to fire station operations, fire engine availability, and workforce deployment, while reflecting on public and

employee feedback and financial considerations to guide future decisions and investments in the service.

Strong public feedback favoured maintaining local services and investment-led approaches to improve reliability and response times. The North Oxfordshire Fire Station proposal would undergo further review.

The Cabinet acknowledged financial implications of these decisions and agreed to consider future investment as part of the 2027-28 budget process. Ongoing engagement with staff, the Fire Brigades Union, and local communities was emphasised, particularly regarding future shift patterns and long-term service sustainability.

## ***Cabinet Member: Local Government Reorganisation and Human Resources***

### **4. Refresh of the Our People & Culture Strategy 2026-2028**

*(Cabinet, 21 April 2026)*

Cabinet received a report on the refreshed Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028 which outlined Oxfordshire Council’s approach to supporting and developing its workforce amid organisational change, focusing on leadership, culture, and capability to deliver quality services. This refreshed strategy was built on previous plans and responded to current challenges including Local Government Reorganisation and financial pressures.

The strategy was designed to help staff navigate the challenges of local government reorganisation, ensuring they felt secure and supported as they transitioned to new roles or organisations, and emphasising the importance of clear communication and ongoing engagement.

## ***Cabinet Member: Transport***

### **5. Local Transport Consolidated Funding Settlement - Local Transport Delivery Plan**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

Cabinet considered a report outlining the Local Transport Delivery Plan (LTDP) in Oxfordshire, which was a requirement following a funding settlement from the Department for Transport. The LTDP detailed how funds will be allocated and spent, with a draft due by 20 March 2026 and a final version by 18 September 2026. The Council was also required to report on carbon emissions forecasts and undertake whole life carbon assessments in line with new guidance, with further details expected later in 2026.

The plan recommended approaches for grant allocation and proposed a programme for submission. Concerns regarding active travel and PM2.5 emissions monitoring were addressed as priorities, and the recommendations were approved.

## **6. Movement and Place Plans**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

Cabinet considered and approved the Bicester and Surrounding Villages Movement and Place (MAP) Plan, which was the second document in the MAP Plan programme. This new plan superseded the previous 2016 “Area Strategies” from Local Transport Plan 4 and was now incorporated as a “Part 2” of the Local Transport Connectivity Plan, directly supporting Policies 52 and 53.

The MAP Plan establishes a vision and guiding principles for the area, is designed to be updated annually, and seeks to address the needs of growth, active travel, and public transport, whilst acknowledging the complexities arising from ongoing development. Member noted concerns regarding the cumulative effects of multiple developments, the need for a dedicated impact board, and whether the plan sufficiently meets the demands of future growth and rural transport.

## **7. Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan**

*(Cabinet, 21 April & 19 May 2026)*

At its April meeting, Cabinet had before it a report setting out the proposed investment plan for surplus income from Oxford’s temporary congestion charge scheme, outlining recommended allocations and justifications for spending to support local transport policies.

Cabinet heard from external speakers on matters including the performance of the free park and ride scheme, bus usage, impacts on small businesses, monitoring arrangements, and proposals for express hospital bus services and enhanced active travel infrastructure.

Cabinet acknowledged the positive outcomes identified to date, including reduced congestion and improved bus reliability, but agreed that further stakeholder engagement and refinement of the proposals was required before formal approval. The decisions on the proposals were deferred until the Cabinet meeting on 19 May 2026.

At its May meeting, Cabinet received a further report with revised recommendations on the investment plan which included transitioning to a £3 combined park and ride ticket, targeted support for NHS and school staff, hospital express services, and active travel schemes.

Following contributions from a number of speakers, the investment plan was unanimously approved, with Cabinet members recognising the need to embed successes, spread benefits widely, and remain aware of the time-limited nature of congestion charge funding. Flexibility was maintained to adapt the plan based on future revenue and stakeholder feedback.

## **8. Updates to the Parking Standards for New Developments**

*(Cabinet, 21 April 2026)*

Cabinet approved proposed updates to the Council's 'Parking Standards for New Developments' to better align with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and recent national policy changes. The updated parking standards aimed to reduce reliance on private cars and encourage sustainable transport, introducing a new 'car light' category and aligning cycle parking requirements with national guidance (LTN 120), while acknowledging local variations in cycling rates.

Cabinet members highlighted the importance of the policy in supporting future housing growth, sustainable transport, and active travel, while noting the need for improved public transport services and enforcement by local planning authorities.

## **9. Quiet Lanes Policy & Pilot Programme**

*(Cabinet, 19 May 2026)*

Cabinet had before it a report on Oxfordshire County Council's proposed Quiet Lanes Policy aimed at enhancing rural road safety and promoting active travel modes such as walking, cycling, wheeling, and horse-riding. The policy established a consistent countywide framework for the assessment, design, and delivery of Quiet Lanes, prioritising physical traffic restrictions and speed limit reductions to create safer, healthier, and more attractive rural routes. The policy will initially be tested through a pilot program before wider implementation.

A budget of £250,000 had been allocated for up to 10 pilot schemes across Oxfordshire, identified through engagement with parish councils and technical feasibility assessments. Evaluation will inform future recommendations and proposals.

Cabinet approved the Quiet Lanes Policy, assessment criteria and toolkit; endorsed the pilot programme; and delegated authority to the Director of Environment & Highways, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport Management, to make the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders for the pilot schemes.

## ***Cabinet Member: Children and Young People***

### **10. Best Start in Life Plan**

*(Cabinet, 19 May 2026)*

Cabinet received a report on the Oxfordshire Best Start in Life Plan which aims to improve early childhood outcomes in Oxfordshire, particularly for disadvantaged children. The plan focusses on timely, coordinated support to improve child development outcomes and reduce inequalities. The plan aligns with national strategies and sets ambitious local targets to exceed national development goals for children, especially those eligible for free school meals.

Early progress included auto-enrolment for free school meals and work to improve family finances and access to school meals.

Cabinet noted the release of the plan and stressed that support should extend beyond education to services such as libraries, community provision, leisure centres, parks, and open spaces.

## ***Cabinet Member: Public Health and Inequalities***

### **11. Cost of Living Programme 2026-29**

*(Cabinet, 21 April 2026)*

Cabinet reviewed a report on Oxfordshire's Cost of Living Support Programme for 2026–2029, introducing the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) to replace the Household Support Fund. The funding will address financial hardship among residents, informed by the previous programme and resident consultation. Cabinet noted cuts in government funding and the discontinuation of school holiday meal vouchers, with the last issued at Easter, and approved targeted support through family hubs, early years services, resident schemes, school-based initiatives, and the Holiday Activities and Food programme.

### **12. Community Cohesion Action Plan**

*(Cabinet, 21 April 2026)*

Cabinet had before it a report detailing Oxfordshire County Council's ongoing efforts to enhance community cohesion in response to a council motion and amid various social challenges. It outlined recent initiatives, contextual background, and future plans to foster stronger, more connected communities.

The report referred to new government guidance and strategy documents on community cohesion, including the Common Ground framework and the Protecting What Matters action plan, which emphasise tackling misinformation, hate crime, and declining trust in institutions.

Cabinet noted the establishment of a cross-party advisory group, ongoing member workshops, and pilot "listening exchange" work in partnership with the University of Oxford. Members welcomed suggestions regarding the role of the public realm and transport schemes in supporting community cohesion.

## ***Cabinet Member: Finance, Property and Transformation***

### **13. Treasury Management Q3 Performance Report 2025-26**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

Cabinet reviewed the third Treasury Management report for the 2025/26 financial year, as required by CIPFA's Code of Practice. The report provided an update on treasury activities and risks up to 31 December 2025, following previous reports in September and November. The report confirmed compliance with prudential indicators, outlined the Council's debt and investment strategies, and reported on the performance of external funds, including the Council's divestment from the Schroder's fund and continued dividend income.

#### **14. Business Management & Monitoring Report - Performance and Risk - Quarter 3 2025-26**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

The Cabinet reviewed the Quarter 3 2025/26 Business Management and Monitoring Report, which formed part of the council's suite of documents outlining ambitions, priorities, and financial performance. The report highlighted a forecasted overspend of £14.1 million, balanced by underspends elsewhere to result in a minor net overspend. Members noted the importance of meeting budget targets in light of uncertain future funding and addressed concerns about underperformance, noting that efforts were underway to improve results. Members also noted, in particular progress in Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, with timeliness improving significantly due to the SEND Improvement Assurance Board.

Cabinet noted the report and its annexes and approved the recommendations including supplementary estimates of £0.9 million for additional election costs, £0.5 million for Bicester Motion, and £2.2 million for Woodeaton Manor Special School. Cabinet also approved updates to Fees & Charges for Environment & Highways

#### **15. Update on High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Funding and Deficits**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

The Cabinet received a report outlining the Government's arrangements for funding High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits up to the end of 2025/26, as detailed in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27. The report highlighted the estimated share of the 2025/26 deficit that Oxfordshire County Council (or the relevant council, subject to Local Government Reform) would need to fund when the statutory override ends on 01/04/2028. Although the Government had not specified funding plans beyond 2025/26, the report presented scenarios for the council's forecast deficit shares in 2026/27 and 2027/28, comparing these with planned funding.

Members noted that the Government would write off 90% of the high needs block deficit, provided the council submitted and gained approval for a SEND reform plan, with the remaining 10% to be funded locally. Future arrangements after 2028 remained uncertain. Officers were preparing a robust SEND reform plan with support from the Department for Education, which was crucial for securing the deficit write-off and improving SEND provision. The council had prudently allocated budget to

address the funding gap and stressed the importance of maintaining parental and carer confidence during the transition.

## **16. Capital Programme Update and Monitoring Report**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

Cabinet reviewed its fourth capital programme update and monitoring report for 2025/26, reflecting activities up to the end of January 2026. This report detailed changes to the Capital Programme since its approval in February 2026, including additional funding, revised budget priorities, and new schemes. Updates incorporated both previously agreed changes and new funding allocations made throughout the year.

Notable additions included the Milton Heights Bridge, funded through Section 106 contributions, Council resources, and retained business rates, to enhance walking and cycling connections in the area. The programme also addressed population growth with new schools and classroom expansions, mainly financed by Section 106 contributions.

The Cabinet Member responded to concerns about project delays and overruns by citing cases of early delivery and stressing the complexity involved in funding and executing major projects.

## **17. Acquisition of a property/lease in Oxfordshire.**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

Cabinet considered a report on acquiring three leases for a property in Oxfordshire, aiming to advance place-shaping and regeneration in line with the Council's economic and corporate objectives. The report outlined the financial due diligence, anticipated income, and prospects for capital growth, highlighting the acquisition's potential to revitalise a neglected area.

Cabinet agreed to acquire the three leases, subject to the terms set out in the exempt annexes to the report. Cabinet also delegated authority to negotiate and finalise the acquisition terms, and to complete all necessary legal documentation, subject to the satisfactory completion of due diligence.

## **18. Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing**

*(Cabinet, 21 April 2026)*

Cabinet had before it a report regarding two updated policies for transferring or leasing council-owned properties to community organisations to promote public benefit and community empowerment. These policies clarified processes, eligibility, and assessment criteria to better support local voluntary and community groups while safeguarding council interests.

The policies established a process for receiving and assessing applications from community groups, with working parties evaluating proposals against council

priorities such as equality and public health. Ongoing monitoring would ensure that groups used assets as intended.

## ***Cabinet Member: Environment and Economy***

### **19. Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC) - Management Re-provision**

*(Cabinet, 17 March 2026)*

Cabinet reviewed a report proposing the procurement of a new management contract for Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) across Oxfordshire. The contract is set to cover an eight-year period commencing on 1 October 2027, with provisions allowing flexibility in light of possible Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The report detailed background information, assessed available options, and considered financial and legal implications, as well as outlining the key milestones for the procurement process.

The Cabinet approved the recommended approach for HWRC management, authorised officers to initiate the procurement process, and endorsed further exploration into the capital purchase of HWRC plant and equipment during the tendering stage. It was agreed that the final decision to award the contract—and any extensions—would be delegated to the Director of Environment and Highways, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.

### **20. Scrutiny Reports**

*(Cabinet, 17 March, 21 April & 19 May 2026)*

Cabinet received the following Scrutiny reports:-

Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports on:

- a) Local Area Partnership Monitoring and Priority Action Plan
- b) Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) Guidance

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee report on Domestic Abuse - Safe Accommodation Provision

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports on:

- a) Road Safety initiatives in Oxfordshire
- b) Repairing of defects and Superusers

**TIM BEARDER**

Leader of the Council

June 2026