OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

To: Members of the Cabinet

Notice of a Meeting of the Cabinet

Tuesday, 21 April 2026 at 2.00 pm

Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

If you wish to view proceedings online, please click on this Live Stream Link.



Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

April 2026

Committee Officer: ***Chris Reynolds***
Tel: 07542 029441; E-Mail: chris.reynolds@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Membership

Councillors

Liz Leffman	Leader of the Council
Neil Fawcett	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources
Tim Bearder	Cabinet Member for Adults
Andrew Gant	Cabinet Member for Transport Management
Sean Gaul	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Kate Gregory	Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities
Jenny Hannaby	Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing and Safety
Ben Higgins	Cabinet Member for Future Economy and Innovation
Dan Levy	Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation
Judy Roberts	Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action

The Agenda is attached. Decisions taken at the meeting will become effective at the end of the working day on 27 April 2026 unless called in by that date for review by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee. Copies of this Notice, Agenda and supporting papers are circulated to all Members of the County Council.

Date of next meeting: 19 May 2026

recycled paper

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

- guidance note below

3. Minutes (Pages 13 - 24)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2026 (**CA3**) and to receive information arising from them.

4. Questions from County Councillors

Any county councillor may, by giving notice to the Proper Officer by 9 am three working days before the meeting, ask a question on an item on the agenda.

The number of questions which may be asked by any councillor at any one meeting is limited to two (or one question with notice and a supplementary question at the meeting) and the time for questions will be limited to 30 minutes in total. As with questions at Council, any questions which remain unanswered at the end of this item will receive a written response.

5. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to present a petition must be submitted no later than 9am ten working days before the meeting.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting.

Requests should be submitted to committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

6. Appointments

7. Reports from Scrutiny Committees

There are no reports from Scrutiny Committees to be considered at this meeting.

8. Improving our Fire and Rescue Service (Pages 25 - 292)

Cabinet Member: Resources and Deputy Leader
Forward Plan Ref: 2026/070
Key decision
Contact: Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety
Rob.macdougall@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

Annex 1 to this report contains information previously designated as exempt from publication but is no longer exempt.

Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to note the contents of this report and confirm its:

i) **support for the fire and rescue service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations.**
ii) **support for the Fire and Rescue Service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the proposal to remove the On Call fire engine from Rewley Road Fire Station.**
iii) **agreement to revisit at a later date the north of Oxford fire station proposal once further details are known.**
iv) **withdraw the proposal to remove the second fire engine at Thame Fire Station whilst the Fire and Rescue Service continue discussions with colleagues around fire and rescue cover in this area.**
v) **agreement to withdraw any station closures from the proposals to provide an opportunity for the service to explore further local and centralised firefighter recruitment.**
vi) **Recognition of the financial implications of recommendations iv and v (as set out in Annex 2) and agreement to consider the need for further investment for the Fire and Rescue Service in line with Options 5 - 7 as part of the budget planning for 2027/28.**
vii) **approval of any other actions required to enable continued engagement and consideration of the revised policy approach.**

9. Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan (Pages 293 - 344)

Cabinet Member: Transport Management
Forward Plan Ref: 2026/007
Key decision
Contact: Hannah Battye, Head of Place shaping
Hannah.battye@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

Cabinet will be asked to consider officer recommendations for uses of the income generated by the temporary congestion charge

Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **approve "part 1" of the congestion charge investment plan, as detailed at Annex 1 and outlined in paragraph 23**

b) **approve "part 2" of the congestion charge investment plan, as detailed at Annex 1 and outlined in paragraph 23**

c) **confirm that allocations to specific projects or schemes in line with the areas of spend identified in Part 2 of the investment plan (including the reserve) can be made under the delegation authorised by resolution (e) of the 10 September 2025 cabinet decision:**

- ***delegate approval for future surplus investment to the Director for Environment and Highways, in consultation with the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Cabinet Member for Transport Management and Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation.***

10. Devolution Update - Thames Valley Strategic Authority (Pages 345 - 386)

Cabinet Member: Leader
Forward Plan Ref: 2026/097
Non-key decision
Contact: Kim Sawyer, Programme Director Devolution
Kim.sawyer@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report of the Chief Executive

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

1. **Note progress on devolution discussions across the Thames Valley between December 2025 and March 2026.**
2. **Note the evolving national policy context and the emerging position on governance and the supplementary expression of interest (EOI) submitted on 20 March 2026.**
3. **Agree the proposed next steps to continue constructive engagement with partner authorities and Government, while maintaining the Council's commitment to securing a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley.**

11. Cost of Living Programme 2026-29 (Pages 387 - 408)

Cabinet Member: Public Health and Inequalities
Forward Plan Ref: 2025/256
Key decision
Contact: Paul Wilding, Programme Manager (Cost of Living)
Paul.wilding@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

To agree an expenditure programme following the government's announcement of allocations from the new Crisis & Resilience Fund for the three year period from 1 April 2026.

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

a) **agree the proposed structure of the cost of living support programme for 2026-29.**

b) **delegate authority to the Director of Public Affairs, Policy & Partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities to agree new areas of expenditure, and allocate funding from the Crisis and Resilience Fund during 2026-29.**

12. Community cohesion action plan (Pages 409 - 414)

Cabinet Member: Public Health and Inequalities
Forward Plan Ref: 2026/045
Non-key decision
Contact: Carol Stow, Engagement and Consultation Manager
Carol.stow@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

Following the motion approved at Council in December 2025, a community cohesion action plan is being developed in partnership with councillors, stakeholders, and communities to strengthen cohesion across Oxfordshire. This report will provide an update on the development of the action plan and the work in train.

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

Note the progress being made by Oxfordshire County Council to provide strengthen community cohesion across the county in response to the motion approved at Full Council on 9 December 2025.

13. Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing (Pages 415 - 476)

Cabinet Member: Finance, Property and Transformation
Forward Plan Ref: 2026/008

Non-key decision
Contact: James Cater, National Management Trainee
James.cater@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Director of Property and Assets

Update to the Community Asset Transfer policy, as well as introducing a Community Leasing policy. These policies define how, where appropriate, the Council can devolve assets to local VCS groups at less than best consideration in recognition of the social value generated by those groups

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **Approve the Community Asset Transfer (Annex 1) and Community Leasing (Annex 2) Policies.**

14. Updates to the Parking Standards for New Developments (Pages 477 - 554)

Cabinet Member: Place, Environment and Climate Action
Transport Management
Forward Plan Ref: 2025/241
Key decision
Contact: Michael Deadman, Transport Development Control Lead Officer
Michael.deadman@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Director of Economy and Place

The Parking Standards for New Developments was adopted in October 2022; it is now due to be updated. Following internal and external engagement on the draft updated document, formal adoption by Cabinet of the finalised updated document is sought.

Approval from Cabinet is also sought to proceed to a statutory consultation, which is necessary to enable changes to LTCP policy to provide suitable support for the Parking Standards.

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

adopt the proposed updates to the 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document as set out in Annex 1.

15. Refresh of the Our People & Culture Strategy 2026-2028 (Pages 555 - 568)

Cabinet Member: Resources and Deputy Leader
Forward Plan Ref: 2025/173
Non-key decision
Contact: Prisca Munzemba, Project Support Assistant
Prisca.mundemba@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Report by Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)

To approve the Our People & Culture Strategy which ensures we develop high-performing, innovative, highly engaged and agile teams. Employing the best people and reflecting the communities we serve.

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

a) **Note the refreshed Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028 and its four priority areas for attracting, supporting, developing and equipping colleagues to deliver high-quality services for Oxfordshire.**

b) **Note that the full Strategy is provided as an accessible PDF, which sets out the detailed approach, supporting actions, and measures of success.**

16. Delegated Powers Report for January to March 2026

Cabinet Member: Leader
Forward Plan Ref: 2025/165
Non-key decision
Contact: Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Democratic Services Manager
Colm Ó Caomhánaigh@oxfordshire.gov.uk

To report on a quarterly basis any executive decisions taken under the specific powers and functions delegated under the terms of Part 7.1 (Scheme of Delegation to Officers) of the Council's Constitution – Paragraph 6.3(c)(i). It is not for Scrutiny call-in.

There has ben no use of delegated powers during the period January to March 2026.

17. Forward Plan and Future Business (Pages 569 - 574)

Cabinet Member: All
Contact Officer: Chris Reynolds, Senior Democratic Services Officer,
chris.reynolds@oxfordshire.gov.uk

The Cabinet Procedure Rules provide that the business of each meeting at the Cabinet is to include "updating of the Forward Plan and proposals for business to be conducted at the following meeting". Items from the Forward Plan for the immediately forthcoming meetings of the Cabinet appear in the Schedule at **CA.** This includes any updated information relating to the business for those meetings that has already been identified for inclusion in the next Forward Plan update.

The Schedule is for noting, but Cabinet Members may also wish to take this opportunity to identify any further changes they would wish to be incorporated in the next Forward Plan update.

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to note the items currently identified for forthcoming meetings.

18. **For information only: Cabinet responses to Scrutiny items** (Pages 575 - 596)

Local Area SEND Partnership
Attainment
Education Other Than At School
Fostering
Business Management and Monitoring Report (Public Health focus)
Parking permits
Social Value

recycled paper

Councillors declaring interests

General duty
You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?
Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

Declaring an interest
Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception
Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

Members Code – Other registrable interests
Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.
Other registrable interests include:

a) Any unpaid directorships

b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.
c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

Members Code – Non-registrable interests
Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:
Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:
a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

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CABINET

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 17 March 2026 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 4.50 pm

Present:

Voting Members:	Councillor Liz Leffman – in the Chair Councillor Tim Bearder Councillor Andrew Gant Councillor Sean Gaul Councillor Kate Gregory Councillor Jenny Hannaby Councillor Dan Levy Councillor Judy Roberts
Other Members in Attendance:	Councillor Brad Baines, Councillor Liz Brighouse OBE, Councillor Imade Edosomwan and Councillor Mark Lygo
Officers:	
Whole of meeting	Martin Reeves (Chief Executive), Lorna Baxter (Deputy Chief Executive) (Section 151 Officer), Anita Bradley (Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer), Paul Fermer (Director of Environment and Highways), Robin Rogers (Director of Economy and Place), Chris Reynolds (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

The Cabinet considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with a schedule of addenda tabled at the meeting, and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda, reports and schedule, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

30/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item. 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Neil Fawcett and Ben Higgins.

31/26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda Item. 2)

There were none.

32/26 MINUTES

(Agenda Item. 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2026 were approved as a correct record.

33/26 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS
(Agenda Item. 4)

See attached.

34/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS
(Agenda Item. 5)

7 - Reports from Scrutiny Committees – Road safety

Peter Barnett

9 - Local Transport Consolidated Funding Settlement - Local Transport Delivery Plan

Robin Tucker
Cllr James Fry

10 – Movement and Place Plans

Paul Finnemore
Robin Tucker
Richard Allen
Cllr Gareth Epps
Cllr James Fry

11 – Treasury Management Q3 Performance Report

Cllr Brad Baines

12 – Business Management and Monitoring Report – Performance and Risk - Q3 2025-26

Cllr Brad Baines

13 – Update on High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant

Cllr Brad Baines

14 - Capital Programme Update and Monitoring Report

Robin Tucker
Cllr Brad Baines

16 – Urgent decision regarding acquisition of property/lease in Oxfordshire

Cllr Liz Brighouse OBE

35/26 APPOINTMENTS
(Agenda Item. 6)

Cabinet noted that Councillor Dan Levy had been appointed to the Thames Valley Fire Control Services Joint Committee.

36/26 REPORTS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEES
(Agenda Item. 7)

Councillor Liz Brighouse OBE, Chair of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presented the reports on:

a) Local Area Partnership Monitoring and Priority Action Plan

b) Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) Guidance

Councillor Liam Walker, Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee presented the reports on:

a) Road Safety initiatives in Oxfordshire

b) Repairing of defects and Superusers

Cabinet to respond to the reports in due course.

37/26 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION IN OXFORDSHIRE: STATUTORY CONSULTATION RESPONSE
(Agenda Item. 8)

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.

Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, presented the report. Councillor Leffman referred to the Council's preferred option for a single unitary authority for the whole of Oxfordshire.

Councillor Leffman moved and Councillor Gant seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

(a) **approve 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.**

(b) **delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and S151 Officer in consultation with the Leader to make any changes to the text/and or formatting of the submissions prior to submission to government whilst not materially affecting the overall content of the responses**

38/26 LOCAL TRANSPORT CONSOLIDATED FUNDING SETTLEMENT - LOCAL TRANSPORT DELIVERY PLAN

(Agenda Item. 9)

Cabinet had before it a report on proposals for a Local Transport Delivery Plan. Oxfordshire County Council had received a funding settlement from the Department for Transport (DfT) and was required to produce a Local Transport Delivery Plan (LTDP) detailing how the allocated funds will be prioritised and spent. A draft LTDP, covering spending for 2026/27 and an outline for 2029/30, was required to be submitted by 20 March 2026, with a final version due by 18 September 2026.

Additionally, the Council was required to report on plans for forecasting carbon emissions as an outcome framework indicator and undertake whole life carbon assessments in transport decisions, in line with DfT guidance released in August 2025. Further reporting details would be provided later in 2026.

The report outlined recommended approaches for grant allocation and identifies the proposed programme for submission to the DfT.

Councillor Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management, presented the report. Councillor Gant explained the consolidation of previous transport funding streams into the Integrated Transport Fund and Bus Services Fund, providing multi-year funding and greater flexibility. The allocations were detailed, with increases in active travel spending and a performance-related element for highways maintenance.

In response to questions from public speakers regarding the importance of active travel schemes and the need for improved monitoring of PM2.5 emissions, Councillor Gant responded that monitoring and health benefits were priorities, and that all feedback was under consideration.

Councillor Gant moved and Councillor Roberts seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

a) **approve the Local Transport Delivery Plan and its submission to the Department for Transport; and**

b) **delegate authority to the Director of Environment & Highways, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport Management, to make changes to specific schemes and projects within the agreed programmes outlined in the Local Transport Delivery Plan.**

39/26 MOVEMENT AND PLACE PLANS

(Agenda Item. 10)

Cabinet had before it a report recommending approval of the Bicester and Surrounding Villages Movement and Place (MAP) Plan. The plan was the second in a series under the MAP Plan programme. Its adoption would formally replace the 2016 “Area Strategies” from Local Transport Plan 4, with the MAP Plans taking their place as “Part 2s” of the Local Transport Connectivity Plan (LTCP), specifically supporting Policies 52 and 53.

Councillor Judy Roberts, Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action, presented the report. Councillor Roberts explained that the plan provided a vision and guiding principles for the area, was intended as a living document to be updated annually, and aimed to balance the needs of growth, active travel, and public transport, while acknowledging the challenges posed by the scale of development.

A number of speakers raised concerns about the cumulative impact of multiple developments around Bicester, the need for a cumulative impact board, and the adequacy of the plan in addressing future growth and rural transport needs.

Councillor Roberts moved and Councillor Gant seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESILVED to approve the adoption and publication of the Bicester and Surrounding Villages Movement and Place Plan (Annex A), and its subsequent supporting documents at A1-A4 (Delivery Plan, proposals map, people postcards, summary of plan).

40/26 TREASURY MANAGEMENT Q3 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025-26

(Agenda Item. 11)

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s (CIPFA’s) ‘Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2021’ requires that committee to

which some treasury management responsibilities are delegated, will receive regular monitoring reports on treasury management activities and risks. Cabinet had before it the third report for the 2025/26 financial year, following previous updates in September and November 2025 and set out the position at 31 December 2025.

Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, presented the report. Councillor Levy confirmed compliance with prudential indicators, described the Council's debt and investment strategies, and reported on the performance of external fund investments, including the divestment from the Schroder's fund and ongoing dividend income.

Councillor Levy moved and Councillor Leffman seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to note the council's treasury management activity for the first three quarters of 2025/26.

41/26 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT & MONITORING REPORT - PERFORMANCE AND RISK - QUARTER 3 2025-26

(Agenda Item. 12)

The business management and monitoring reports are part of a suite of performance, strategic risk and finance documents which set out the council's ambitions, priorities, and financial performance.

Cabinet received a report setting out the Quarter 3 2025/26 performance and Strategic risk overview for the council.

Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, presented the report. The report detailed a forecast overspend of £14.1 million, offset by underspends elsewhere, resulting in a small net overspend. Councillor Levy emphasised the importance of achieving financial results in line with budgets, especially given future funding uncertainties. Councillor Levy responded to concerns expressed by a speaker regarding underperformance in some indicators and said that the report focused on exceptions and that directors were working to strengthen performance.

With regard to Section 106 funds, Councillor Levy explained that these were held until contractual conditions were met, particularly for education projects, and that holding these funds was a feature of the system rather than a failing.

During discussion, Councillor Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, referred to significant improvements in the timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, rising from 18% to nearly 92%

within a year, attributing this to the work of the SEND Improvement Assurance Board.

Councillor Levy moved and Councillor Leffman seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:

a) **note the report and annexes.**

b) **approve a supplementary estimate request of £0.9m relating to additional election costs and supplementary estimates of £0.5m for Bicester Motion and £2.2m relating to Woodeaton Manor Special School (Annex D paragraph 23).**

c) **approve the write off of 2 corporate debts totalling £50k (Annex D paragraph 26)**

d) **approve the write off of 12 Adult Social Care contribution debts totalling £270k (Annex D paragraph 29).**

e) **note the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block 2025/26 forecast and accumulated deficit position ((Annex D paragraphs 36 - 40).**

f) **approve the updates to Fees & Charges for Environment & Highways (Annex D – Appendix 5)**

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42/26 UPDATE ON HIGH NEEDS DEDICATED SCHOOLS GRANT (DSG) FUNDING AND DEFICITS

(Agenda Item. 13)

Cabinet received a report which explained the arrangements for funding High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant deficits up to the end of 2025/26 as set out by the Government as part of the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27.

The report provided an update on the estimated share of the 2025/26 deficit that will need to be funded by Oxfordshire County Council, or relevant council(s), subject to Local Government Reform, when the statutory over-ride ends on 1 April 2028. While the government had not provided information about funding beyond 2025/26 at this time, the report set out scenarios showing the estimated share of forecast deficits for 2026/27 and 2027/28

that may need to be funded locally and how those compared to existing planned funding.

Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation presented the report.

Councillor Levy explained that the government would write off 90% of the high needs block deficit, conditional on the Council submitting and having approved a SEND reform plan. The remaining 10% must be funded locally, and there was uncertainty about future arrangements beyond 2028.

Officers were developing a robust SEND reform plan, with support from the Department for Education. The plan's acceptance was crucial for securing the deficit write-off and ensuring ongoing improvements in SEND provision.

The Council had taken a prudent approach by allocating budget to manage the gap between government support and actual SEND expenditure and had emphasised the importance of maintaining trust and confidence among parents and carers during this period of change.

Councillor Levy moved and Councillor Gaul seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

a) **note the update on the treatment of High Needs DSG Deficits up to 31 March 2026 set out in the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27.**

b) **note the changes to High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding and approve the mid and worst case forecast deficits for 2026/27 (paragraph 26 and Table 1).**

c) **note the funding that is planned to be available to meet the residual element that the council will need to fund following the end of the statutory override.**

43/26 CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE AND MONITORING REPORT

(Agenda Item. 14)

Cabinet had before the fourth capital programme update and monitoring report for 2025/26 which set out the monitoring position based on activity to the end of January 2026.

The report also updated the Capital Programme approved by Council in February 2026 taking into account additional funding, new budget priorities and new schemes. The updated programme also incorporated changes agreed through the Capital Programme Approval Reports to Cabinet during the year as well as new funding.

Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation presented the report. The Milton Heights Bridge had been added to the capital programme, with funding from Section 106 contributions,

Council resources, and retained business rates. The bridge would improve walking and cycling connections and was seen as a key piece of infrastructure for the area. The capital programme also included new schools and classroom expansions in response to population growth, with most funding sourced from Section 106 contributions.

Councillor Levy responded to comments made by a speaker concerning delays and cost overruns in major projects by highlighting examples of projects delivered ahead of schedule and emphasised the complexity of funding and delivery.

Councillor Levy moved and Councillor Roberts seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

a) note the capital monitoring position for 2025/26 set out in this report and summarised in Annex 1.

b) approve the updated Capital Programme at Annex 2 incorporating the changes set out in this report.

Additions to the Capital Programme

c) approve the inclusion of Milton Heights Bridge into the capital programme, with a budget of £8.608m, to be funded from a variety of funding sources. (see paragraph 65-66)

44/26 HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES (HWRC) - MANAGEMENT REPROVISION

(Agenda Item. 15)

RESOLVED: that the public be excluded for the duration of this item since it is likely that if they were present during the item there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and specified below in relation to this item and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information

Cabinet had before it a report on a proposal for the procurement of a new management contract for Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). The contract was intended to cover the management of HWRCs across Oxfordshire for an 8-year period starting 1 October 2027, with flexibility provisions related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The report included background information, options appraisal, financial and legal considerations, and outlined key dates for the procurement process.

Councillor Judy Roberts, Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action presented the report.

Councillor Roberts moved and Councillor Hannaby seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

a) **approve the preferred approach to the reprovision of the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) management as set out in paragraphs 5 and 31.**

b) authorise Officers to prepare and commence the procurement of a new 8-year HWRC management contract to start on 1 October 2027 (following a mobilisation period) with options to support flexibility in Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

c) endorse exploration and feasibility of the capital purchase of HWRC plant and equipment during the tender bidding, with a view to having an agreed final revenue and capital cost of the contract at the final tender stage.

d) delegate the decision to award the contract, and any extension to that contract to the Director of Environment and Highways in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action.

45/26 URGENT DECISION RELATING TO THE ACQUISITION OF A PROPERTY/LEASE IN OXFORDSHIRE.

(Agenda Item. 16)

RESOLVED: that the public be excluded for the duration of this item since it is likely that if they were present during that item there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and specified below in relation to that item and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information

Cabinet had before it a report on the proposed acquisition of three leases on a property in Oxfordshire to support place shaping and regeneration aligned with its economic ambitions and corporate priorities.

Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, presented the report. He outlined the financial due diligence undertaken, the expected income return, and the potential for capital appreciation. The acquisition was seen as an opportunity to regenerate a

neglected area, improve connectivity, and support the Council's place-shaping ambitions.

Councillor Levy moved and Councillor Leffman seconded the recommendations and they were approved.

RESOLVED to:-

a) **agree to the acquisition of three leases, on the terms set out in exempt Annex 1 and 2.**

b) **delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation to negotiate and agree the final acquisition terms which will be substantially in accordance with the details set out in exempt Annexes 1,2,3,4 and 5.**

c) **delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Director of Property & Assets and the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, to conclude negotiations and complete all necessary legal documentation (subject to the completion of all due diligence exercises) to implement the acquisition.**

46/26 FORWARD PLAN AND FUTURE BUSINESS

(Agenda Item. 17)

The Cabinet considered a list of items for the immediately forthcoming meetings of the Cabinet together with changes and additions set out in the schedule of addenda.

RESOLVED to note the items currently identified for forthcoming meetings.

47/26 FOR INFORMATION ONLY: CABINET RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY ITEM

(Agenda Item. 18)

Cabinet noted the response to the Scrutiny item on The Virtual School.

…….in the Chair

Date of signing ……..

Cabinet

21 April 2026

Improving our Fire and Rescue Service

Report by the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

Note the contents of this report and confirm its:

i) support for the fire and rescue service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations.
ii) support for the Fire and Rescue Service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the proposal to remove the On Call fire engine from Rewley Road Fire Station.
iii) agreement to revisit at a later date the north of Oxford fire station proposal once further details are known.
iv) withdraw the proposal to remove the second fire engine at Thame Fire Station whilst the Fire and Rescue Service continue discussions with colleagues around fire and rescue cover in this area.
v) agreement to withdraw any station closures from the proposals to provide an opportunity for the service to explore further local and centralised firefighter recruitment.
vi) Recognition of the financial implications of recommendations iv and v (as set out in Annex 2) and agreement to consider the need for further investment for the Fire and Rescue Service in line with Options 5 - 7 as part of the budget planning for 2027/28.
vii) approval of any other actions required to enable continued engagement and consideration of the revised policy approach.

Executive Summary

2. This report provides Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet (**Cabinet**) with an interim update on the "Improving our Fire and Rescue Service" public consultation and sets out a revised policy direction informed by consultation feedback, officers' professional view and supporting evidence. While the consultation covered a wider range of proposals, this paper focuses on the implications for station closures, fire engine provision and investment choices, alongside the next steps for the main proposal and the potential future development of a new fire station in the north of Oxford.

3. Over the past decade, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) has experienced a 36% reduction in full-time equivalent on-call firefighters, resulting in significantly reduced daytime appliance availability at times of highest demand. Despite ongoing investment in recruitment, retention and overtime, on-call availability can fall to around 20% during the day, meaning that only a small proportion of the Service's 34 fire engines may be available at peak times. This has placed increasing pressure on response performance, operational resilience and community safety.

4. In response, OFRS commissioned independent operational modelling to review its emergency response arrangements and developed a set of proposals aimed at improving daytime availability and overall system resilience. These included a main proposal to introduce 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call stations, alongside additional proposals relating to station locations, the number of fire engines numbers and potential investment options.

5. The consultation was extensive and independently analysed by the Centre for Consultation, providing assurance that it met good practice standards. Engagement levels were high, with around 1,500 people engaging overall, including 1,230 survey responses. Feedback demonstrated strong public interest and concern, particularly in relation to proposals involving station closures and the removal of fire engines. At the same time, consultation responses showed strong - often conditional - support for investment led alternatives, notably maintaining current firefighter numbers, retaining station support roles and protecting urban resilience.

6. Where opposition was expressed, it was driven primarily by concerns about loss of local fire cover, reduced operational resilience, workforce sustainability and confidence in the modelling's ability to fully reflect local and worst-case operational scenarios. While some respondents acknowledged the challenges facing the Service and the need to modernise, there was a consistent emphasis on maintaining reliable 24hour protection, particularly for rural, edge of county and vulnerable communities.

7. Having considered the consultation feedback alongside financial information, equality and climate assessments and professional judgement, the report recommends a revised policy approach. This includes withdrawing proposals relating to station closures and the removal of the second fire engine at Thame, while continuing structured engagement with employees and their

representatives on the main proposal and further work on the potential north Oxford fire station.

8. The report also highlights a clear preference, expressed through consultation, for investment led solutions that address underlying workforce and resilience challenges. Cabinet is therefore invited to note the implications of these preferences as part of future budget planning and longer-term service sustainability.

9. The report concludes that while the underlying case for change remains strong, the consultation feedback has underscored the importance that respondents place in local resilience, workforce confidence and public trust. The recommended approach seeks to balance evidenced improvement of emergency response performance with meaningful engagement, clearer communication of the supporting evidence and the development of options that deliver long-term value and protection for Oxfordshire's residents.

Introduction and Background

10. This report provides Cabinet with an interim update following the "Improving our Fire and Rescue Service" public consultation that took place between 28 October 2025 and 31 January 2026 following Cabinet's approval on 21 October 2025 (see Cabinet report at annex 1). The public consultation sought the views of fire and rescue employees, the public and other stakeholders regarding a series of proposals primarily aimed at ensuring that we can consistently provide more fire engines during the day, enabling us to reach incidents across Oxfordshire faster than we do now.

11. The main aims of this report are to provide Cabinet with a general synopsis of the public consultation and to make recommendations with respect to the proposals for the closure of fire stations and the removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station.

12. This interim report draws on an independent external analysis of the consultation feedback in the course of making recommendations regarding the proposals set out in the public consultation.

13. The 'Improving our Fire and Rescue Service' public consultation followed a review of the emergency response strategy that was partly initiated following a long term and continuing decline in on-call appliance availability. Over the past 10 years, the number of full-time equivalent on-call firefighters in Oxfordshire has dropped by 36%. As a result, the staffing hours they provide can be as low as around 20%, far below what's needed during the day. This can mean that during our peak times for incidents, only around 5 out of 27 on-call fire engines might be available.

14. A key part of the review comprised commissioning external consultancy support via ORH (Operational Research in Health), to conduct a comprehensive analysis

of the existing operational model and through an iterative collaborative process, to design the proposals that were taken forward to consultation.

Current emergency response operating model

15. Whilst they are not always available to respond to emergencies because of a shortage of staffing, we have 34 fire engines across Oxfordshire with the same crewing model's day and night:

- 7 are crewed by full-time (wholetime) firefighters.
- 27 are crewed by on-call firefighters.

16. We use both full-time (wholetime) and on-call firefighters to respond to emergencies. Wholetime firefighters work full-time and are always based at the station, ready to respond immediately. On-call firefighters are employees who generally live or work around five minutes from a fire station and who declare the times of the day that they can then respond if needed.

17. We have 25 fire stations across Oxfordshire, and these are shown on Figure 1 with their associated crewing models. 19 fire stations are in the smaller towns and villages in the county and operate on-call staffing. Six fire stations are in larger towns and Oxford city and operate 24/7 providing full-time staffing. These stations also have on-call crews.

18. Three stations (Oxford's Rewley Road and Slade Park, and Banbury) run a 24/7 shift pattern for full-time firefighters called "2-2-4" (two-day shifts, two-night shifts, four days off). Three stations (Abingdon, Didcot, and Kidlington) use a "day-crewing" model where full-time firefighters work during the day and live in nearby housing so they can respond quickly at night.

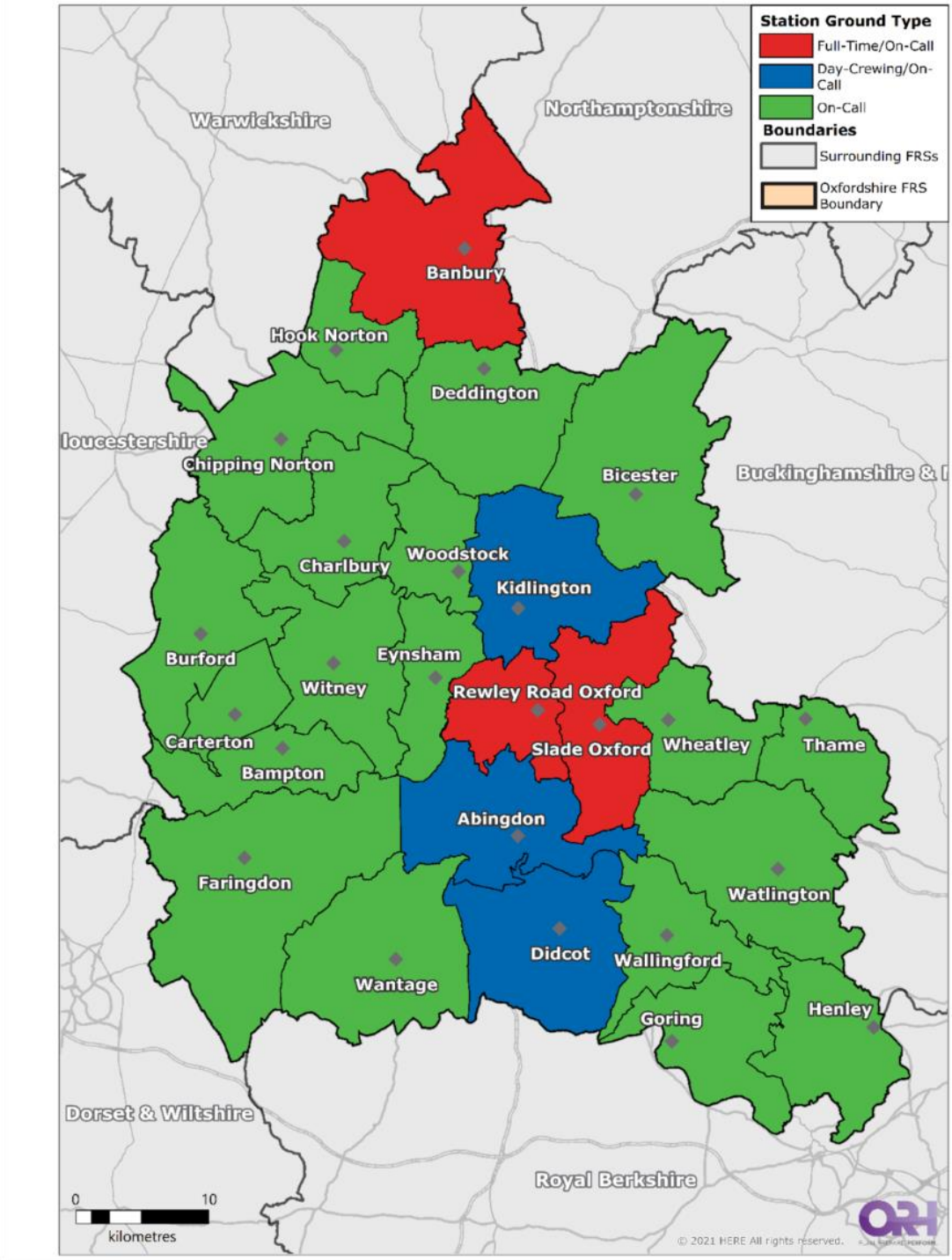


Figure 1 - Map of current crewing models at Oxfordshire fire stations

Public consultation proposals

19. The proposals taken forward to public consultation were aimed at ensuring that we have fire stations, resources, and people in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of communities and improve the safety, efficiency and resilience of the service. Seven proposals were made comprising one main proposal with a further six proposals which were layered on top of and built on the main proposal.

These proposals were forecast overall to enable us to get to incidents across Oxfordshire more quickly than we can now.

20. The proposals were split into three themes:

i) Effectiveness - Changes that are designed to make us more effective.

ii) Efficiency – Changes that are designed to use our financial resources and our people differently to deliver improved services overall.

iii) Investment – Changes that are enabled by increasing the funding that the service receives

21. The main proposal (Option 1a and 1b from the original Cabinet report) comprised implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations. These stations being Bicester, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Wallingford (or Crowmarsh) and Witney (see Figure 2). The full-time firefighters would crew the fire engine during the day, while the on-call crews would crew the fire engine at night (with on-call firefighters also crewing a second fire engine during the day and night at Bicester and Witney). This would be done by reallocating firefighters from existing roles, including removing one of Rewley Road's full-time fire engines and reducing the number of firefighters on fire stations. This proposal also involved the removal of the single on-call fire engine at Rewley Road due to very low staffing hours.

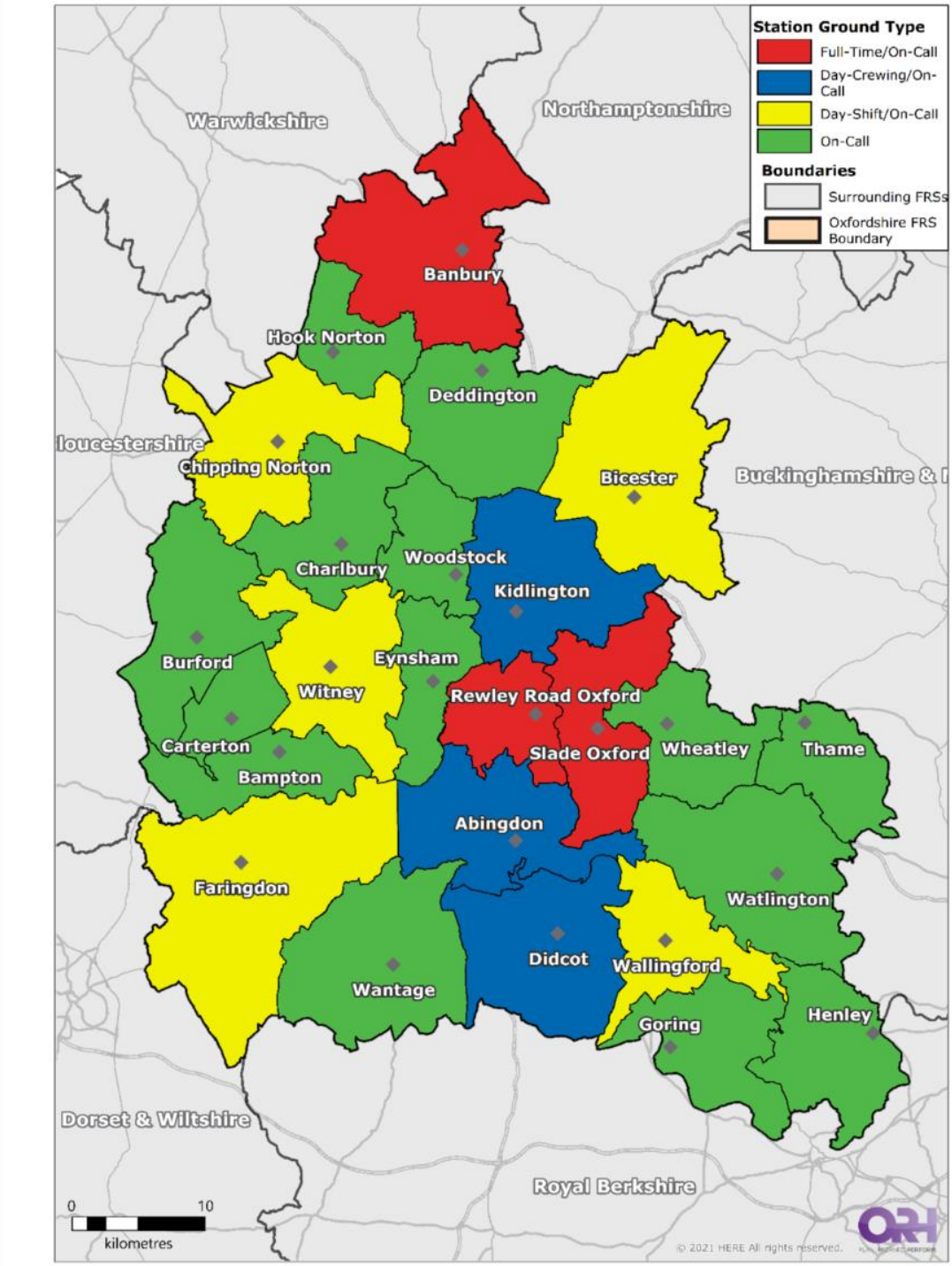


Figure 2 - Map of crewing models at Oxfordshire fire stations under the main proposal

22. The further six proposals were as follows with option numbers in brackets indicating the original Cabinet paper option numbers:

i) Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station in Oxford and Kidlington Fire Station (Option 2) including the removal of the on-call fire engine from Rewley Road (Option 3)

ii) Removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station (Option 4)

iii) Invest to keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7 rather than removing one to enable the main proposal (Option 5)

iv) Invest to keep current firefighter numbers at each station rather than reducing them to enable the main proposal (Option 6)

v) Invest to keep Station Support Officers rather than removing them to enable the main proposal (Option7)

vi) Closure of three on-call fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock (Option 8)

Why change is needed

23. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has a responsibility to provide a safe, reliable and sustainable emergency response for the communities it serves. To do this well, the service must regularly review how its resources are organised and be transparent about whether existing arrangements still work in practice. As part of the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2026, OFRS is dedicated to *"providing services that reduce the likelihood of harm to people and their environment; services that put our community first, ensure equality in our provision and achieve greater value for money".*

24. OFRS have invested significantly in the recruitment and retention of on-call employees. Despite this, on-call availability continues to decline in Oxfordshire, with a 36% reduction in the number full-time equivalent (FTE) on-call firefighters over the last 10 years. This change has seen fire engine availability become greater during the night when the number of incidents and the risk to our communities are at their lowest and then reduced during the day when emergency response demand and community risk are at their highest.

25. Across Oxfordshire for 2024/25, overall, on-call availability was 58% and closer to 20% during the day, continuing an ongoing decline in on-call appliance availability and negatively impacting response time performance. This often results in us having a far lower number of appliances available in the daytime, routinely down to twelve fire engines rather than the 34 that the service has in place, even with additional cover provided through overtime and additional support.

26. Currently, the only virtually guaranteed fire cover consists of seven fire engines staffed by full-time firefighters. The reduction in on-call availability hours has an impact on response times. Due to limited on-call availability during periods of high demand, the service may not be able to provide consistent support for routine operations or for events that require substantial resources, such as severe weather occurrences or prolonged large-scale incidents.

Urban growth

27. Strong population and economic growth linked to Oxfordshire's status as a leading global centre for science, technology, and higher education is driving urban growth in the county. The region is experiencing significant investment and development in key areas like the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor. However, whilst Oxford city itself has seen slower population growth, population growth in surrounding rural districts is greater, partly driven by the planning constraints that limit development in Oxford.

28. Importantly, increased housing and commercial development does not automatically mean that additional greater levels of fire and rescue resources are required. Both at a local level and nationally, data shows that there has not been a correlation between a growing population and incident numbers. Although overall incident numbers in Oxfordshire have risen in recent years, this is largely due to false alarms, which we continue to address through targeted prevention and engagement work and which was built into the modelling underpinning the consultation proposals. Serious fires have reduced by more than 30% since 2009/10, and road traffic collision rates have remained broadly stable over the same period. What is more important is how risk changes, how developments are designed, and how effectively resources can be deployed to respond to emergencies.

29. Over the next decade, population and housing growth in Oxfordshire will be concentrated in several key areas, in part to meet unmet housing needs from Oxford city. This presents challenges to OFRS on the basis that this growth will continue to create increased community risk in locations that are further way from our existing fire station locations. This will mean that there is a risk of our response times increasing over time unless we optimise our emergency response model to improve emergency response, particularly during peak daytime demand, by improving resilience and positioning our resources where they can deliver the greatest benefit.

Financial drivers for change

30. Whilst the primary driver for change is the long-term decline in on-call availability and increasing response times, the service is also committed to achieving greater value for money including constantly looking for ways to use its funding differently to improve the services it provides to the public.

31. The service spends significant money on overtime to improve the level of fire engine availability day-to-day. Recent refreshed analysis using improved internal data collection linked to internal policy changes tentatively suggests that the service is set to spend approximately £500k per annum on overtime under the current operating model. This equates to approximately 1.65% of the Fire and Rescue Service's overall net revenue budget, some of which could likely be put to a different use in support of a more effective and efficient operating model.

32. The Fire and Rescue net operating budget will increase by 2.52%% in 2026/27, rising from £31.7M to £32.5M. The service overspent against its budget 2024/25 by £623k and has a forecast overspend of £461k in 2025/26. As a result of the Fair Funding Review, the Council faces significant funding reductions in 2027/28 and

2028/29. In addition, rising demand and costs will put further pressure on budgets. Savings will need to be agreed in order that the Council can set a balanced budget for both 2027/28 and 2028/29. In addition, the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation in Oxfordshire could result in the requirement for a free-standing Fire and Rescue Authority ahead of a potential move to a Foundation Strategic or Mayoral Strategic Authority. It will be important therefore that consideration is given to the budget the Fire and Rescue service has in light of this position.

Community safety work capacity

33. The service is currently limited in its ability to deliver community safety work, particularly in Oxfordshire's rural and lower population density urban communities. Whilst the primary aim of the review was to identify proposals for a new emergency response model, it was considered that the review could also provide an opportunity to improve the service's capacity to deliver community safety work, such as prevention/protection activities as well as to assist with the management of operational risk information which supports our emergency response activity.

Consultation and Engagement

34. A public consultation lasting just under 14 weeks was carried out between 28 October 2025 and 31 January 2026. The consultation and associated public engagement sessions were designed to provide respondents with sufficient information, time and opportunity for people to understand the proposals and to express their views to be considered as part of any final decision-making processes.

35. The consultation included:

- Hosting of all information on the county council's online consultation portal, Let's talk Oxfordshire at https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ofrs-consultation
- Publication of a consultation document explaining the need for change and the proposals
- A supporting set of documents that provided more detailed information to transparently demonstrate the methodology used to develop the proposals and to inform readers about the impact of the proposals.
- Public engagement events held both online and at key in-person events.
- Targeted engagement with the Fire Brigades Union, service employees, members, MPs. Parish/Town councils and other key partners.
- Two-way social media engagement

36. The consultation approach was designed to be accessible, transparent and fair, with printed documents and surveys made available on request.

37. All responses were independently analysed by the Centre for Consultation[1] which helps to provide assurance that the process meets good practice in support of the Gunning principles.

[1] https://www.centreforconsultation.org/

Public engagement

38. To publicise the consultation widely, a range of online and offline communications channels were used, with a strong focus on local targeting for the public engagement meetings and internally on staff engagement. Externally focused activities included: news releases, organic social media posts, content in residents' newsletters and targeted stakeholder communications.

39. Social media engagement for the public consultation was approached with a strong commitment to public engagement, transparency, and community reach. Over the course of the consultation period, OFRS's Facebook channels have, in general, achieved significant growth and engagement.

40. The central marketing and campaigns team supported the consultation with a coordinated programme of social media activity. They shared posts from both the council's and OFRS Facebook pages throughout the consultation period. Area-specific posts were shared on local Facebook groups to extend reach and promote both the events and the consultation itself.

41. Targeted communications on Nextdoor.co.uk[2] were also used to promote the public events, signpost people to further information, and encourage participation in the consultation. Alongside this, the marketing and campaigns team invested in paid social media promotions to increase reach ensuring that residents received email notifications with full consultation details, with the aim of increasing engagement.

42. In addition, resident and stakeholder email communications were also used to maximise reach to people and businesses across Oxfordshire with stakeholder networks used to share the information with their own staff and colleagues to maximise awareness.

43. Both central and local fire station pages have been drivers for effective community engagement. Over the consultation period, we have received over 3.5-million-page views on our OFRS page with an average daily reach of 43,932 people which is an increase of 49%. Most of our content was focused on the public consultation. Total interactions during the period were 454,257, which is an increase of 51%.

44. The Fire and Rescue Service also delivered a programme of staff, stakeholder and public engagement events. This activity included extensive staff engagement sessions, briefing sessions for councillors and MPs, targeted meetings for local councils in areas identified as most impacted by the proposals, three online public engagement events open to all, and three in-person public meetings in areas most affected by the proposals. In addition senior fire and rescue service officers attended a range of other meetings where invited, including presenting the proposals to neighbouring fire and rescue authorities.

[2] https://nextdoor.co.uk/

45. Over 425 people attended one or more public meetings either online or in person. 16,200 people viewed the project landing page on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire portal and 3,987 people downloaded at least one of the accompanying documents.

Public and employee consultation

46. This section summarises the public and staff consultation carried out, and it explains how the consultation was conducted and the main themes raised by respondents.

47. The consultation was designed to ensure that communities, employees and other stakeholders were given a clear opportunity to understand the proposals, consider their potential impacts, and express their views to feed into the final decision-making process.

48. The public consultation took place between 28 October 2025 and 31 January 2026. It was originally intended for the consultation to last 12 weeks although an extension was later communicated to enable as many people as reasonably practical to engage meaningfully with the proposals. In all, around 1,500 people actively engaged with the consultation; some are likely to have engaged in more than one way. This level of engagement was considered to be a positive outcome.

49. A total of 1,230 responses were received via an online and postal survey. The survey included both closed questions (e.g. agreement scales and impact ratings), and open-ended questions, allowing respondents to explain their views in detail.

50. The Centre for Consultation applied a mixed-methods approach to the feedback analysis:

- Quantitative analysis to understand the distribution of opinion, and
- Qualitative analysis to understand the reasoning behind responses.

This is to ensure that the findings reflect both **what** respondents think and **why** they think it. Their analysis is descriptive and evidence-based, aiming to reflect the range and nature of views expressed. Further detail regarding the methodology applied can be found in their full report (see Annex 3).

General feedback

51. The consultation received 1,230 responses, indicating strong public engagement. Across the main proposal, 65.6% of respondents expressed negative views and 68.2% perceived a negative impact on communities. Opposition was strongest in relation to station closure proposals, where 78.4% of respondents expressed negative views and 79.5% perceived a negative impact. In contrast, investment options attracted consistently strong support, particularly investment to maintain current firefighter numbers, which 82.6% of respondents rated as highly important. Investment in an additional 24/7 fire engine in Oxford and the retention of Station Support Officers were also strongly supported, rated as highly important by 66.6% and 68.9% of respondents respectively.

Main proposal - implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations. These stations being Bicester, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Wallingford (or Crowmarsh) and Witney

52. Responses to the consultation on the main proposal were predominantly shaped by concerns about how the proposed daytime-focused deployment model would operate in practice and its implications for service availability, workforce sustainability and operational resilience. While some respondents supported the principle of better aligning resources with periods of higher demand, this support was typically cautious and conditional and was outweighed by concern about reduced night-time provision and increased reliance on on-call availability.

53. A consistent theme across responses was the perceived trade-off between improving daytime cover and maintaining reliable 24-hour service provision. Many respondents expressed concern that gains in daytime availability could be offset by reduced certainty of cover overnight, particularly in Oxford and surrounding areas. Night-time was frequently characterised as a period of heightened risk, with respondents emphasising that incidents occurring at night may be more severe, detected later and require rapid intervention to prevent escalation.

54. Concerns were also raised about the proposed reliance on on-call firefighters overnight, alongside reduced wholetime availability. Respondents questioned the reliability of this model in practice, highlighting variability in on-call availability and the potential for mobilisation delays. There was a perception that this could reduce confidence in the service's ability to respond promptly and consistently to incidents at night, particularly during periods of concurrent demand.

55. Workforce sustainability and resilience emerged as a key driver of opposition or concern. Respondents frequently highlighted the proposed 12-hour day shifts as difficult to sustain over time, citing potential impacts on fatigue, wellbeing, work-life balance and retention. There was concern that these working patterns could exacerbate existing recruitment and retention challenges, weaken morale and, in turn, undermine the reliability of service delivery rather than resolve underlying capacity issues.

56. Across responses, there was scepticism about the extent to which the modelling underpinning the main proposal reflects real-world operational conditions. Respondents frequently questioned the reliance on averages, arguing that county-wide performance measures may obscure local variation, peak demand, concurrent incidents and the practical realities of travel, geography and appliance availability. Some also expressed concern that the modelling focused on incident frequency rather than severity and did not sufficiently account for future risk arising from population growth, development and changing risk profiles.

57. Overall, consultation feedback on the main proposal indicates that concern is driven less by opposition to improving efficiency or modernising deployment models in principle, and more by the perceived risks associated with reduced night-time certainty, workforce sustainability and operational resilience. Many respondents expressed the view that improvements to daytime cover should not

come at the expense of reliable 24-hour protection, and that addressing underlying workforce challenges was seen as central to achieving sustainable improvement.

Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station in Oxford and Kidlington Fire Station (Option 2) including the removal of the on-call fire engine from Rewley Road (Option 3)

58. Responses to the consultation in relation to the proposal for a new fire station north of Oxford were largely shaped by concerns about the proposed consolidation of existing facilities and the perceived impact on local coverage, response times and operational resilience. While some respondents recognised potential benefits associated with a modern, strategically located facility, this support was typically conditional and outweighed by concern about the loss of distributed, locally based provision within Oxfordshire.

Removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station (Option 4)

59. In respect of the proposal for the removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station, responses were primarily driven by concerns about the role of the second fire engine in maintaining local capacity, response reliability and continuous cover. Many respondents highlighted Thame's role in serving surrounding areas and the frequency with which the primary fire engine is already committed, with the second fire engine viewed as actively required rather than surplus capacity.

60. Respondents pointed to existing and increasing operational pressures in the area, including major transport routes such as the M40, population growth and evolving risk profiles. There was concern that removing the second fire engine would increase response times when additional resources are required and would reduce resilience during concurrent or high-impact incidents.

61. As with station closure proposals, respondents questioned the extent to which modelling adequately reflects local conditions in Thame, including variability in demand and real-world operational constraints. There was a strong view that average performance measures do not capture worst-case scenarios or the cumulative impact of reduced capacity on local and cross-border resilience, particularly given parallel proposals consulted on by Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

62. Across the station closure and removal of the second fire engine from Thame proposals, respondents expressed mixed views on workforce and financial considerations. While some acknowledged underlying crewing challenges and supported the principle of reallocating underused resources, many argued that investment in recruitment, retention and alternative crewing models should be explored as a means of maintaining provision rather than reducing it. Concerns were also raised about the potential impact of closures or removals on workforce morale and longer-term resilience.

63. Overall, the consultation feedback indicates that opposition to this proposal is driven less by resistance to system optimisation in principle, and more by the

perceived loss of immediate local protection, reduced operational resilience and concerns that important local risks and functions are not fully captured through modelling alone.

Closure of three on-call fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock (Option 8)

64. Responses to the consultation in relation to these proposals were largely shaped by concerns about the potential loss of local fire and rescue provision and the perceived implications for community safety, response times and system resilience. While some respondents expressed support for elements of the proposals on efficiency or value-for-money grounds, this was limited and was outweighed by concern about reduced local availability of fire engines and increased reliance on more distant resources.

65. In relation to the proposed closure of fire stations, respondents consistently emphasised the importance of immediate, locally available response. Many expressed concern that the removal of stations would increase travel distances and reduce the visibility and reassurance provided by a local fire service presence. Particular concern was raised about impacts on rural and peripheral communities, which respondents felt could be disproportionately affected.

66. A recurring theme was scepticism about the extent to which average response time modelling reflects real-world conditions. Respondents frequently highlighted that small changes in county-wide averages could mask more significant local impacts, particularly during peak demand, periods of concurrent incidents or where road conditions, traffic, geography and appliance availability affect response. There was also concern that modelling did not fully capture the wider roles played by fire stations, including prevention, community safety activity and the value of local knowledge.

67. Respondents also raised concerns about operational resilience and system capacity. The removal of stations was widely perceived as reducing the service's ability to respond to simultaneous incidents and to provide surge capacity during major or prolonged events. Some respondents expressed concern that this would increase reliance on neighbouring stations and support from other services, potentially weakening resilience across the wider system.

68. As before, opposition to station closures is driven by the perceived loss of immediate local protection, reduced operational resilience and concerns that important local risks and functions are not fully captured through modelling alone.

Invest to keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7 rather than removing one to enable the main proposal (Option 5)

69. Responses to the proposal to invest in retaining an additional fire engine in Oxford 24/7 were predominantly supportive and contrasted sharply with feedback on proposals involving reductions in cover. A clear majority of respondents rated this proposal as highly important, reflecting a strong desire to maintain response

capacity within Oxford, particularly given the city's high incident demand, dense population and concentration of heritage buildings and complex risks.

70. Qualitative feedback emphasised the importance of resilience and surge capacity in the city, with respondents viewing an additional permanently available appliance as a necessary safeguard against concurrent incidents, prolonged operations and nighttime risk. Many respondents framed this investment as an appropriate mitigation for other elements of the proposals, particularly where modelling indicated that response performance in Oxford could worsen. There was a recurring view that, where trade-offs are required, investment to protect high risk urban areas represented a more acceptable and equitable approach than removing resources.

71. Overall, support for this proposal was driven by confidence that it would enhance operational resilience, public safety and reassurance, and by a belief that targeted investment in Oxford would address some of the concerns raised about reduced coverage under other proposals.

Invest to keep current firefighter numbers at each station rather than reducing them to enable the main proposal (Option 6)

72. The strongest and most consistent support across all investment options related to the proposal to invest in maintaining current firefighter numbers at each station. An overwhelming majority of respondents rated this proposal as highly important, reflecting widespread concern that workforce capacity, rather than station footprint alone, is fundamental to service reliability, resilience and safety.

73. Respondents frequently argued that staffing shortages underpin many of the risks identified elsewhere in the consultation, including appliance unavailability, reliance on overtime, pressure on on-call crews and reduced resilience during peak or concurrent demand. Maintaining firefighter numbers was therefore seen as a preventative measure that could stabilise the system, improve availability and reduce the likelihood that reductions in infrastructure or appliances would be required.

74. Qualitative feedback also linked this proposal to workforce wellbeing, morale and retention. Respondents expressed concern that reducing establishment levels could exacerbate fatigue, undermine safety and increase attrition, while investment in maintaining numbers was viewed as supporting both firefighter welfare and community outcomes. Overall, the proposal was widely seen as addressing the root causes of service fragility rather than managing its consequences.

Invest to keep Station Support Officers rather than removing them to enable the main proposal (Option7)

75. Responses to the proposal to invest in retaining Station Support Officers were predominantly positive, with a clear majority of respondents identifying this as a high importance investment. While often discussed less prominently than frontline

staffing, respondents consistently recognised the role of Station Support Officers in supporting recruitment, retention and day-to-day operational readiness, particularly within the on-call system.

76. Respondents highlighted that Station Support Officers play a key enabling role in maintaining availability, reducing administrative burden on operational staff, and sustaining engagement with local employers and communities. In this context, the proposal was frequently linked to concerns about declining on-call availability, with respondents viewing this investment as a practical means of strengthening capacity without reducing physical infrastructure.

77. Support for this proposal was often framed as part of a wider preference for investment-led solutions. Many respondents argued that retaining Station Support Officers would help address the underlying workforce challenges identified throughout the consultation and would be more effective than pursuing efficiency measures that reduce stations or appliances. Overall, the proposal was seen as offering good value for money by supporting long-term sustainability and resilience across the service.

Equality impact assessment

78. Respondents raised a range of concerns regarding the potential equality impacts of the proposals, particularly in relation to how changes to fire cover may affect groups with higher levels of vulnerability or dependency on timely emergency response. Many respondents highlighted that reductions in local provision, changes in response times, or increased reliance on more distant resources could have a disproportionate effect on older people, people with disabilities or long-term health conditions, and those with limited mobility. There was a recurring view that these groups are less able to self-evacuate, may be more reliant on rapid intervention, and therefore face heightened risk if response times increase, even marginally.

79. A further theme related to place-based inequality, with respondents expressing concern that rural, edge of county and more isolated communities could experience greater adverse impacts than urban centres. These areas were often described as having older population profiles, fewer alternative emergency services nearby, and road networks that make response more sensitive to distance and travel conditions. Respondents argued that countywide averages risk obscuring these unequal local impacts and that communities with higher needs or greater vulnerability could be disproportionately affected by a reduction in nearby fire and rescue provision.

80. Respondents also raised equality considerations in relation to the workforce. Changes to duty systems, relocation of stations and the loss of tied accommodation were seen as having potential disproportionate impacts on firefighters with caring responsibilities, family commitments or health needs. In particular, extended or altered shift patterns were described as more difficult to accommodate for those with childcare or other caring roles, raising concerns about fairness, morale and workforce retention. Some respondents also linked these

workforce impacts back to community outcomes, arguing that destabilising the workforce could indirectly affect service reliability in areas already at higher risk.

81. Several stakeholders, including representative organisations, explicitly questioned whether the Equality Impact Assessment went far enough in identifying and addressing these issues. While acknowledging that equality impacts were recognised in principle, respondents expressed concern that the assessment did not fully reflect the cumulative or distributional effects of the proposals, particularly where response performance in Oxford City was forecast to worsen or where multiple changes could interact to heighten risk for specific communities. There was a strong theme that where adverse impacts were identified, respondents expected a clearer explanation of why these were considered acceptable, what alternatives had been explored, and how mitigations would be secured in practice.

82. Overall, consultation feedback indicates that equality considerations were a material concern for respondents and closely linked to wider views about risk, fairness and public protection. Opposition in this area was driven less by challenge to the need for change in principle, and more by concern that some communities and groups could bear a greater share of the impact, and that these effects may not be fully captured through high-level modelling or average performance measures alone.

Implications for Policy Direction

83. The service recognises that consultation must be meaningful and capable of influencing decision-making and the public consultation was approached with that principle firmly embedded.

84. Following the close of the consultation, feedback was reviewed in full and it has been considered alongside a range of other information, for example financial information, the equalities impact assessment, climate impact assessment and professional judgement.

85. Given the central importance of the main proposal, alongside the proposed new fire station north of Oxford, to the future effectiveness of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, it is considered appropriate to take additional time to reflect on the consultation feedback and to continue engagement with employees and their representatives. These proposals are fundamental to improving the consistent availability of fire engines and ensuring that resources are positioned to reach the highest-risk incidents as quickly as possible across the county.

86. The consultation feedback demonstrates the strength of feeling associated with these two proposals and highlights the importance respondents place on maintaining confidence in 24-hour emergency cover. In light of this, further consideration will be given to the feedback received, alongside additional discussion with employees, to ensure that the proposed approach is both operationally robust and clearly understood in terms of its intended outcomes and underlying evidence.

87. It is also important to note that many respondents expressed strong concern about the implications of any reduction in night-time wholetime cover, particularly with regard to incident severity, detection delays and the potential for escalation during the night. While night-time incidents can be particularly serious and time-critical, incident data for Oxfordshire does not support the assumption that overall risk to communities is consistently higher at night when assessed across the full range of incident types, frequency and outcomes. This distinction could have been communicated better through the consultation information that we provided and, as a result, was not always reflected in consultation responses.

88. Respondents also commonly questioned the validity of the modelling used to assess the impact of the proposals, arguing that the use of averages could obscure local complexity and variability. In particular, respondents questioned whether modelling could adequately capture concurrent incidents, local geography, traffic conditions and worst-case scenarios. These concerns were a significant factor in shaping opposition to the proposals and reflect a broader scepticism about whether modelling can adequately capture operational reality.

89. However, the modelling underpinning the proposals was explicitly designed to account for local complexity rather than smooth it out. It is based on real-world Oxfordshire incident data and simulates service operation under the proposed arrangements across 200 modelled runs, using randomised conditions to reflect variation in incident timing, location, appliance availability and concurrent demand. This approach is intended to test performance across a wide range of plausible operating scenarios rather than relying on a single average outcome.

90. Notwithstanding this, the consultation feedback highlights the need to further explain how the modelling reflects local conditions and operational realities, and to ensure that employees and stakeholders have confidence in how evidence has been interpreted. The additional time being taken will therefore be used to consider both the substantive feedback received and how the supporting evidence and assumptions are communicated, alongside continued engagement with the workforce.

91. The closure of fire stations and/or removal of fire engines is understandably concerning for sections of our communities particularly those local to where the changes are proposed to take place. Survey respondents raised detailed concerns about response times; concurrent incidents; workforce sustainability; modelling limitations; worst-case scenarios. Many respondents viewed proposals as a cut to the existing service rather than efficiency measures.
Although the proposals were mainly framed around challenges with on-call recruitment, many respondents expressed concern about the longer-term implications for investment in the service and the potential cumulative impact of reductions in infrastructure, staffing or appliances.

92. There was a range of reasons expressed for opposition to the proposals to close fire stations including concerns about local response capability, operational resilience, concurrent incidents and the wider role of stations in prevention and community safety. The service has clearly stated that on-call fire stations that provide a high-level of fire engine availability generally present excellent value-for-

money for taxpayers. Local support for them therefore presents the service with an opportunity to encourage people to become firefighters in their local communities.

Cabinet Recommendations

Main proposal

The main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations. These stations being Bicester, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Wallingford (or Crowmarsh) and Witney.

93. Officers still consider the main proposal to create 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters a critical aspect of future emergency fire engine response in Oxfordshire. Despite strong views from some consultation respondents, this proposal, with or without some redesigned aspects, remains key to helping to consistently increase fire engine availability in the day and reducing response times.

94. Based on the information and estimates, the main proposal (options 1a/1b) are not self-financing from a capital perspective and to enable delivery of Rewley Road, rebuild costs requires the adoption of the recommendation to Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station and Kidlington Fire Station (Option 2).

95. The potential of Options 1b and Option 2 from the original report are not included in the existing capital programme

96. However, ongoing consultation to gather insight from our employees and negotiation with the Fire Brigades Union remains essential to the main proposal. This continued internal dialogue is therefore critical to help review and, if necessary, redesign the main proposal.

97. **Recommendation i) Cabinet is recommended to give their support for the fire and rescue service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to the main proposal comprised of implementing 12-hour day shifts for full-time firefighters at five currently on-call fire stations.** This will be with a view to final proposals being brought back to Cabinet for further debate and decision in Summer 2026.

98. If elements of the main proposal are redesigned, it is acknowledged that this might result in changes to the revenue or capital cost modelling. If the required revenue and/or capital costs increase, this could be compounded by recommendations iv) and v) (below) which, if supported by Cabinet, would create a new and lower cost envelope within which to deliver the main proposal.

99. The main proposal included the removal of the On Call fire engine at Rewley Road which would impact a small number of employees. The service wishes to further

explore the impact of this change and how best to retain the skills of the individuals that could be impacted.

100. **Recommendation ii) Cabinet is recommended to give their support for the Fire and Rescue Service to continue engagement with its employees with respect to this proposal.** This will be with a view to the proposal being brought back to Cabinet for further debate and decision in the summer.

Additional proposals

Building a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace Rewley Road Fire Station (in Oxford) and Kidlington Fire Station

101. A north of Oxford fire station location offers significant benefits in terms of improving county-wide average response times whilst also aiding the service to ensure that it has a building estate that is fit for purpose. Despite some negative feedback from some consultation respondents, we are minded continuing exploring this proposal as Officers believe it to offer positive opportunities for emergency fire and rescue response and the wider service in Oxfordshire.

102. Proposals for the north of Oxford fire station depend on developer negotiations for the potential release of the Rewley Road site coupled with planning complexities associated with identifying a new site towards the north of Oxford. Both of these aspects are complex and will take significant time to negotiate. Officers remain optimistic about its long-term potential.

103. **Recommendation iii) Cabinet is recommended to revisit the north of Oxford fire station proposal once more details are known.** A further paper will be brought to Cabinet when the details are clearer. The current strategy for the redevelopment of Rewley Road will continue to be regularly reviewed in line with the wider developer negotiations.

104. Within the consultation, the future of specialist rescue provisions was referenced as the current crewing model is linked to Kidlington Fire Station which could be impacted by this proposal. It has been agreed that further work is needed to explore the provision of the different types of specialist rescue provision and that this needs to be done separately to this proposal given the significance of any changes in this area and the importance of our specialist rescue capability to Oxfordshire and the surrounding areas.

Removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station

105. In parallel with our own public consultation, Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service also ran a public consultation which included changes to fire station/engine provision including at Haddenham. Whilst our two services were aligned on proposals heading into our respective consultations, it is important that we now collectively reflect on the feedback and consider long term proposals collaboratively given the proximity of Thame and Haddenham Fire Stations.

106. **Recommendation iv) Cabinet is recommended to withdraw the proposal to remove the second fire engine at Thame Fire Station whilst the Fire and Rescue Service continue discussions with colleagues around fire and rescue cover in this area.**

107. As set out in Annex 2, the financial implication of this recommendation is a reduction in annual revenue savings compared to the report to Cabinet in October 2025 of £31,600 per year plus a reduction in one off savings of £10,000.

Closure of three on-call fire stations three on-call fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock

108. Strong community support for the fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock has been demonstrated throughout the public consultation which could be a catalyst for us undertaking further structured engagement and targeted recruitment in those communities.

109. **Recommendation v) Cabinet is recommended to withdraw any station closures from the proposals to provide an opportunity for the service to explore further local and centralised firefighter recruitment.** This would be with the aim of achieving improved and sustainable fire engine availability, reducing emergency response times and improving the value that taxpayers receive from these stations. The success of this would be evaluated over coming years through a structured evaluation framework to enable the service to revisit and review the effectiveness and efficiency of stations in the future.

110. As set out in Annex 2, the financial implication of this recommendation is a reduction in capital receipts of £1.2m compared to the report to Cabinet in October 2025 as well as a reduction in annual revenue savings of £579,000 and avoidance of one-off costs of £147,500.

Further investment in the Fire and Rescue Service to deliver one of the following:

- **Option 5 - Keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7 rather than removing one to enable the main proposal at an additional annual cost between £670,500 and £1,280,000 (per Annex 2)**
- **Option 6 - Keep current firefighter numbers at each station rather than reducing them to enable the main proposal at an additional annual cost of £1,260,000 (per Annex 2)**
- **Option 7 - Keep Station Support Officers rather than removing them to enable the main proposal at an additional annual cost of £621,000.**

111. **Recommendation vi) Cabinet are recommended to continue to consider the need for further investment for the Fire and Rescue Service in line with Options 5 – 7 as part of the budget planning for 2027/28**.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

112. Whilst the original consultation proposals and the recommendations outlined in this paper are intended primarily to result in improvements in Fire and Rescue emergency response, wider benefits that align with the county's corporate priorities could also result.

113. **The climate emergency** - The reduction in fire engines coupled with the rationalising and improvement of the fire station building portfolio could result in net reductions in the council's carbon footprint. However, with the recommendation in this paper to pause on the closure of Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock fire stations, coupled with the pausing of the removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station, these opportunities are going to be impacted. Any subsequent opportunities to deliver change in support of the climate emergency will then be deferred until the decision-making with respect to the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal.

114. **Inequalities** – The creation of day shift fire stations in some of the more rural areas under the main proposal if subsequently taken would provide the fire and rescue service with resources to help drive community safety initiatives in these areas and potentially provide the council with resources to help deliver to initiatives to address social, economic, health and educational inequalities. This will be reevaluated in the deferred decision-making papers associated with the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal.

115. **Health and Wellbeing** - The creation of day shift fire stations in some of the more rural areas would provide the fire and rescue service with greater resources to deliver the service's 'Safe and Well' interventions, supporting the council's drive to improve our residents' physical and mental wellbeing. This will be reevaluated in the deferred decision-making papers associated with the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal.

Legal Implications

116. The Council's powers and responsibilities are principally set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Fire and Rescue Services have a duty to have regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018 (the Framework) when carrying out their functions (s21 of the Act). One of the priorities of the Framework is to be accountable to communities for the services they provide (paragraph 1.7 of The Framework). This includes providing the opportunity for communities to help plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement and to have scrutiny arrangements in place (paragraph 7.1 of the Framework). This report provides an interim update on the results of the public consultation that took place following the Cabinet Decision of October 2025 and sets out a revised policy direction informed by consultation feedback, officers' professional view and supporting evidence.

117. This approach is in line with the Council's powers and responsibilities as a Fire and Rescue Service under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and related legislation and in line with its powers and duties under the Localism Act 2011 and in line with the Gunning principles on public consultation.

Comments checked by: Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Regulatory), Jennifer.crouch@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Financial Implications

118. Annex 2 provides summary of the capital and revenue financial implications and the changes compared to the original proposals as set out in the report to Cabinet in October 2025. Costs and estimates are based on the current (operational) view. For the purposes of the financial analysis, the option naming/numbering used in the October 2025 Cabinet paper has been retained to help illustrate the amended financial position. The changes between the 2 proposals are:

Item	Value £	Notes
Capital Receipt	(£1,200,000)	Reduction in receipt through withdrawal from station closure
Revenue One-Off	(£147,500)	Net costs avoidance from withdrawal from station closure
Revenue PA Ongoing	£610,600	Future annual savings no longer deliverable from withdrawal from station closure and Thame appliance

119. The recommendation set out in this report to remove the proposed closure of three fire stations and the removal of the second fire engine at Thame increase the risk that the service will continue to overspend against its budget as has been seen in 2024/25 and 2025/26. In addition, recommendation vi seeks consideration of further investment in the service of between £621,000 and £1,280,000 per year. This needs to be seen in the context of the Council's overall financial position as set out in paragraph 32, as well as the possibility of the need to create a free standing Fire and Rescue authority prior to a move to a Foundation Strategic or Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Comments checked by: Drew Hodgson, Finance Business Partner drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Equality & Inclusion Implications

120. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was undertaken as part of this work and informed the development of the original proposals (see annex 4). The EIA considered the impact that the proposals would have on our communities and our employees, and its purpose is to identify and mitigate any disproportionate impacts.

121. The service considers the EIA to be a critical component of the public and employee consultation process to surface impacts that the service is not fully sighted on. This process helps to ensure that we meet our statutory duties in the

course of carrying out public consultation but also that we reflect best practice to prevent or minimise disproportionate impacts.

122. Given that the nature of the recommendations within this paper do not change the status quo at this time, the EIA has not yet been revised. However, the equalities impact feedback we have received via the consultation is valuable and will be used to strengthen the EIA as part of the next phases of the project, helping to support the discussions with our employees and any future Cabinet decision making regarding the implementation of changes.

Sustainability Implications

123. A Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) was created as part of this work to capture and inform the impact stemming from the proposals (see annex 5).

124. The recommendations made in this paper do not involve new development or property changes. The proposals are not expected to increase harmful emissions or resource consumption, but they do remove the immediate opportunity to reduce emissions through pausing on fire station closures and fire engine removals.

Risk Management

125. The following risks have been identified and assessed by the service in developing the recommendations presented for Cabinet approval in this paper.

(a) **Future growth and emerging risk** - Significant housing and infrastructure growth is planned across Oxfordshire. There is a risk that future development could increase incident demand or change risk profiles in ways that require additional fire and rescue resources. Growth has however been considered and it forms a part of the rationale for change. The recommendations presented in this paper also do not limit the service's ability to expand or relocate resources in the future should evidence demonstrate that this is necessary.

(b) **Impact on staff, morale and wellbeing** – The original set of proposals always carried the clear risk of adversely impacting employee morale and damaging industrial relations and this was certainly heard throughout the consultation with perceptible trust between the senior members of OFRS and the wider service negatively impacted. Deferring the decision regarding the main proposal and the north of Oxford fire station proposal risks prolonging the anxiety that some employees will be feeling regarding these specific proposals. To that end, the service recognises the need to engage and support affected employees. The recommendation to remove any station closures as part of this programme or the removal of the second fire engine at Thame will hopefully, however, be welcomed by affected employees. It will be imperative that the service takes immediate steps to resource further recruitment support for Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock fire stations and that we pursue further discussion about collaborative opportunities with

colleagues in Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service as far as Thame is concerned.

(c) **Increased emergency response times in Oxford City and at night** – Given the recommendation in this paper that any final decisions regarding the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal are deferred, there remains a risk that subsequent decision-making as part of this project could result in increased emergency response times in Oxford City and across Oxfordshire at night. A key part of any subsequent decision-making will involve further consideration of consultation feedback and other relevant matters with respect to these proposals and weighing up the impact on community safety overall.

(d) **Reduced fire engine resilience at night** – Similarly, whilst deferred, the reduction in fire engines being crewed by full-time firefighters at night under the main proposal and north of Oxford fire station proposal means that there is still the possibility that the service recommends that greater reliance is placed on fire engines crewed by on-call firefighters at night. If supported by Cabinet, there is a risk that this increased reliance on on-call resources could result in fire engine availability challenges if on-call availability reduces at nighttime in the same way as we see it currently trending in the day.

(e) **Financial challenges** – Both revenue and capital funding remain a challenge for the council. Whilst the original proposals were never intended to save money, the recommendations contained within this paper will prevent the ability for the council to realise capital receipts from the disposal of fire stations and prevent OFRS from the cost avoidance that closing the stations would have enabled. However, neither the capital or cost avoidance opportunities associated with the station closures of removal of Thame's second fire engine were originally required to deliver the main proposal or north of Oxford fire station proposal. Nevertheless, the financial viability of any decisions associated with these deferred decisions will need to be evaluated separately and the ability to deliver effective redesign could be constrained by the recommendations within this paper.

NAME
Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

Annex:

Annex 1 – October 2025 Cabinet Report: Improving our Fire and Rescue Service (consultation approval)(main report and exempt annex)

Annex 2 – Cover Model Finances - April 2026 final

Annex 3 – Consultation analysis report

Annex 4 - Fire and Rescue Cover Model Equality Impact Assessment

Annex 5 – Fire and Rescue Cover Model Climate Impact Assessment

Contact Officer: Jason Crapper, Head of Business Transformation, Fire and Rescue Service, jason.crapper@oxfordshire.gov.uk, Tel. 07766498055

April 2026

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Cabinet

21 October 2025

Fire and Rescue Cover Model Review

Report by the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet are RECOMMENDED to Support the Fire and Rescue Cover Model being taken forward to public consultation with a view to authority being delegated to the Chief Fire Officer and Director for Community Safety Services (CSS) to undertake a 12-week employee, stakeholder and public consultation on the proposals and to report back to Cabinet thereafter.**

Executive Summary

"As Oxfordshire grows and changes, we need to ensure that our fire stations, resources and people are in the right place at the right time to meet the needs of our communities and improve the safety, efficiency and resilience of our service"

2. The primary duties of the Fire and Rescue Authority (Oxfordshire County Council) are contained within the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004[1]. This requires the provision, training and equipping of the service to provide:

   - Firefighting
   - Protection of people and property from fire
   - Fire Safety promotion
   - Road Traffic Collision rescues
   - Other emergency responses to civil emergencies

3. In addition to these statutory obligations, there are approved National Fire Standards[2] which Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) are required to give due regard to. This includes making decisions about the deployment of resources based on prioritised risk levels and planning assumptions. To achieve this, consideration should be given to internal and external resource availability (people, financial and physical), this should include collaborative, cross-border and national resilience assistance. As part of the standard, OFRS are also required to consider strategic influences, such as consultation feedback, stakeholder engagement and political objectives.

4. The Fire and Rescue Service in Oxfordshire is at a crossroads. The traditional on-call firefighter model has become increasingly difficult to sustain, especially during

[1] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents
[2] https://www.firestandards.org/standards/approved/

daytime hours. This is largely due to changes in how people live and work, making it harder to find individuals able to commit significant time to on-call duties. As a result, there are periods when many of our on-call fire engines are unavailable, even during peak demand, forcing the service to rely on reactive measures like moving crews and paying overtime just to maintain minimum coverage and impacting response times. This not only strains resources but also limits the ability of firefighters to engage in vital preventative and community safety work, which is essential for reducing incidents and keeping Oxfordshire safe.

5. Yet, this challenge presents an extraordinary opportunity to reshape the service for the future. By adopting a new cover model, the service can better align resources with when and where emergencies are most likely to occur, ensuring faster response times and a more resilient workforce. The proposed changes will allow the service to draw on the strengths of both the on-call and whole-time teams, creating a more balanced and effective approach. This will not only improve emergency response but also free up capacity for essential prevention and community engagement, making Oxfordshire safer for everyone. Through consultation with the public, workforce, and partners, the service can build a model that is fit for the future, one that supports the dedication of our people while meeting the evolving needs of the community.

Sustainability Implications

6. A Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) has been drafted and will remain a live document throughout the internal and public consultation and decision-making process. The assessment has indicated that the proposals would have a net positive contribution on the climate with reductions and environmental improvements in the council building portfolio, the reduction in Fire and Rescue Service fleet and the reduction in commuter mileage for employees.

Legal Implications

The legal implications section should be completed by a member of the legal service

7. The County Council's powers and responsibilities are principally set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Fire and Rescue Services have a duty to regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018 (the Framework) when carrying out their functions (s21 of the Act). One of the priorities of the Framework is to be accountable to communities for the services they provide (paragraph 1.7 of The Framework). This includes providing the opportunity for communities to help plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement and to have scrutiny arrangements in place (paragraph 7.1 of the Framework). Whilst it is not an absolute duty to adhere to the Framework, in practice this means that a compelling case would need to be made to justify a departure from the requirements laid down in the Framework.

8. One way to ensure the Fire and Rescue Service is accountable to its communities may involve engaging with the public, including by way of public consultation, to ensure any policy decision/ change aligns with the needs of the community.

9. Under the Localism Act 2011, there is a duty to promote community engagement. Although this act primarily focuses on local governance, the FRS, as a public body, is encouraged to consult and involve the public in decision-making processes related to policy changes.

10. The Gunning consultation principles criteria for public consultations as laid out in 1985 are:
Gunning Principle 1: Consultations must occur while proposals are still at a formative stage.
Gunning Principle 2: Sufficient information needs to be supplied for the public to give the consultation 'intelligent consideration'.
Gunning Principle 3: There needs to be an adequate time for the consultees to consider the proposal and respond.
Gunning Principle 4: Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before decisions are made.

Comments checked by:
Jennifer Crouch, Legal Services, Head of Law and Lead Business Partner (Environmental Team) jennifer.crouch@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Financial Implications

The financial implications section should be completed by a member of the finance service

11. The paper covers several options, including linked options. For the purposes of financial considerations this has been separated in table 2 within the exempt sections annex to show both revenue and capital impacts. Costs have been included at the current (operational) view, including estimated costs. Based on the information and estimates included both option 1a/1b are not self-financing from a capital perspective and to enable delivery of Rewley Road rebuild costs requires adoption of option 3.

12. The potential of options 1b and option 2 are not included in the existing capital programme.

13. It is also important to consider the existing annual pressure the service currently has of between £500k-£750k and depending on the options selected could allow the mitigation of this deficit.

14. It should be recognised that the approach taken by the service has not run scenarios to understand the financial versus performance impact of changes in operating locations; It is based on improvement to performance using the existing budget.

15. From a pure financial option 8 would contribute to addressing the current financial pressures in the service and as stated not have a significant impact on performance levels. For clarity, a table summarising and comparing the options are provided in the **Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.Error! Reference source not found.**appendix within the exempt section annex.

16. All fire and rescue services have strategically committed to enhancing wholetime firefighter productivity by 3% and achieving 2% non-pay efficiency savings (Section 36). If both were cashable savings it would equate to £821k & £127k based on the 2025/26 budget.

17. The detail behind the summary positions have been worked through with the Service and the Property & Assets Team. These are only indicative capital values at this stage.

18. The options presented do not create a balanced capital position and to achieve them, additional funds would be required to be generated.

Comments checked by:
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NAME
Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety

Annex: **Exempt annex:** Exempt report sections
Exempt annex: FRS Cover Model Equality Impact Assessment
Exempt annex: FRS Cover Model Climate Impact Assessment

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October 2025

Exempt Section under Access to Information Procedure Rules – Section 10.1 Category 4 Information relating to contemplated consultations and negotiations in connection with labour relations matters arising between the authority and employees and trade unions.

1. OFRS have invested significantly in the recruitment and retention of on-call employees. Despite this, on-call availability continues to decline in Oxfordshire, **with a 36% reduction in the number full-time equivalent (FTE) on-call firefighters over the last 10 years.** This change has seen fire engine availability become greater during the night when activity levels (including incidents) are at their lowest and then reduced during the day when emergency response demand and activity levels are higher.

2. **Across Oxfordshire for 2024/25, overall, on-call availability was 58% and closer to 20% during the day, continuing an ongoing decline in on-call appliance availability and negatively impacting response time performance. This often results in us having a far lower number of appliances available in the daytime, routinely down to twelve fire engines rather than the 34 that the service has in place, even with additional cover provided through overtime and additional support.**

3. Urban growth in Oxfordshire linked to the county's strengths as a global centre for science, technology, and higher education presents challenges to OFRS on the basis that population expansion will continue to create increased community risk in locations that are further way from our existing fire station locations. This will mean that there is a risk of our response times increasing over time unless we optimise our emergency response model.

4. OFRS is committed to achieving greater value for money and constantly looking for ways to use its funding differently to improve the services it delivers to the public. The review has identified that during the 2021, 2022 and 2023 calendar years, the service spent an average of **£344.5k** annually on additional staff payments for appliance availability. This equates to approximately 1.5% of the fire and rescue service's overall revenue budget which could be put to a different use in support of a more effective and efficient operating model.

5. The service has overspent its budget in recent years (£75k overspent in 2022/23, £857k in 2023/24 and £784k in 2024/25). With the service being forecasted to follow this trend for 2025/26 and likely going forwards, it is imperative that we identify options to deliver our services within budget. Additionally, in alignment with the National Spending Review in 2021 and 2024, fire and rescue services have strategically committed to enhancing wholetime firefighter productivity by 3% and achieving 2% non-pay efficiency savings (cashable or non-cashable) annually. This review therefore also presents an opportunity to identify cashable and non-cashable efficiencies to both manage the service's overspend and to enable reinvestment in other parts of the service to improve its services.

6. The consultation process will be fully aligned with the Gunning Principles[1].

Introduction and Background

7. As part of the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2026[2], OFRS is dedicated to *"providing services that reduce the likelihood of harm to people and their environment; services that put our community first, ensure equality in our provision and achieve greater value for money".*

8. In 2022, a review was initiated to enable OFRS to continue to provide an effective, efficient and resilient service to the communities of Oxfordshire. The initial elements of the review were to analyse and implement changes at a policy and procedural level. This review was partly initiated following a long term and continuing decline in on-call appliance availability.

9. The aim of the Fire and Rescue Cover Review is to ensure that the service has the required number of resources at the right time and in the right location. This is with a view to mitigating risk and managing demand to provide the optimal safety for the communities of Oxfordshire and our employees. The review considered several modelling factors to support this aim, including:

- The health, wellbeing and safety of our employees
- Assured emergency response cover (i.e., how we can make better use of wholetime resources to ensure increased resilience)
- Consideration of both first and second fire engine response times
- Productivity, investment and financial impacts
- Matching our resources and staffing models to risk and demand
- Economic social value benefits
- New shift opportunities and benefits

10. In September 2024, OFRS commissioned ORH[3] (Operational Research in Health), an independent evidence-based consultancy company, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the existing operational model. This collaboration helped create options that address the modelling factors and ensure efficient resource allocation.

Current Operating Model

11. The current OFRS operating model uses employees on both wholetime and on-call duty systems to fulfil its primary role of responding to emergency incidents.

12. Wholetime firefighters operate on a full-time contractual basis and provide an immediate response from stations.

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[1] The Gunning Principles are four legal rules that ensure public consultations are fair and meaningful: they require that consultations happen early, provide enough information, allow adequate time, and that responses are genuinely considered.

[2] https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fire-and-community-safety/oxfordshire-fire-and-rescue-service/community-risk-management-plan

[3] https://www.orhltd.com/sector/fire/

13. On-call firefighters are paid employees of the service, who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and are available to respond to various emergencies and support their communities through other activities. They maintain their everyday lives and jobs until their alerter sounds, at which point they assume their duties as firefighters.

14. OFRS has 34 fire engines, and 14 specialist vehicles based throughout the county to support with emergency response. Of the 34 fire engines, 27 are staffed by employees conditioned to the on-call duty system, and seven by wholetime employees (including those on day crewing shift systems – see par. 28).

15. The service borders six other fire and rescue services: Buckinghamshire, Royal Berkshire, Dorset and Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Services. Each neighbouring service offers mutual cross-border assistance when required.

16. The on-call duty system remains one of the most prevalent response models, with 48 out of the 52 UK fire and rescue services utilising this approach. This system ensures coverage for 90% of the UK's landmass. In Oxfordshire, of the 25 fire stations, 19 are solely staffed by the on-call duty system, with the remaining six having an on-call fire engine.

17. Nationally, the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters is becoming increasingly challenging. Although OFRS has only experienced a 3% decrease in the number of on-call firefighters (headcount) from 2014 to 2024, there has been a much more significant decline in the hours provided by on-call personnel. Specifically, there has been a 36% reduction in the number of FTE on-call firefighters in Oxfordshire during the same period. This reduction is notably higher than the national level, which has seen a 26% FTE reduction in on-call firefighters.

18. The reduction in hours worked by on-call firefighters has adversely affected the daytime availability of on-call fire engines. Figure 1 illustrates the availability of fire engines before additional cover support ('Gartan[4]') and with additional cover support ('Vision[5]'). It demonstrates that on-call fire engine availability is significantly higher during nighttime hours when operational activity is at its lowest, and it decreases during daytime hours when the demand for fire engine services is at its peak. Overall on-call appliance availability in the daytime is declining over time as depicted in figure 2, with the 2020/21 increase attributable to the COVID lockdown that year. These figures exclude additional support provided through overtime etc. This often results in us having a far lower number of appliances available in the daytime, routinely down to twelve fire engines rather than the 34 that the service has in place, even with additional cover via overtime etc.

[4] Gartan software allows on-call personnel to manage their available hours, offering an up-to-date overview of staffing availability at each on-call station.
[5] Vision is the command-and-control software used by Thames Valley Fire Control to dispatch resources and manage incidents.

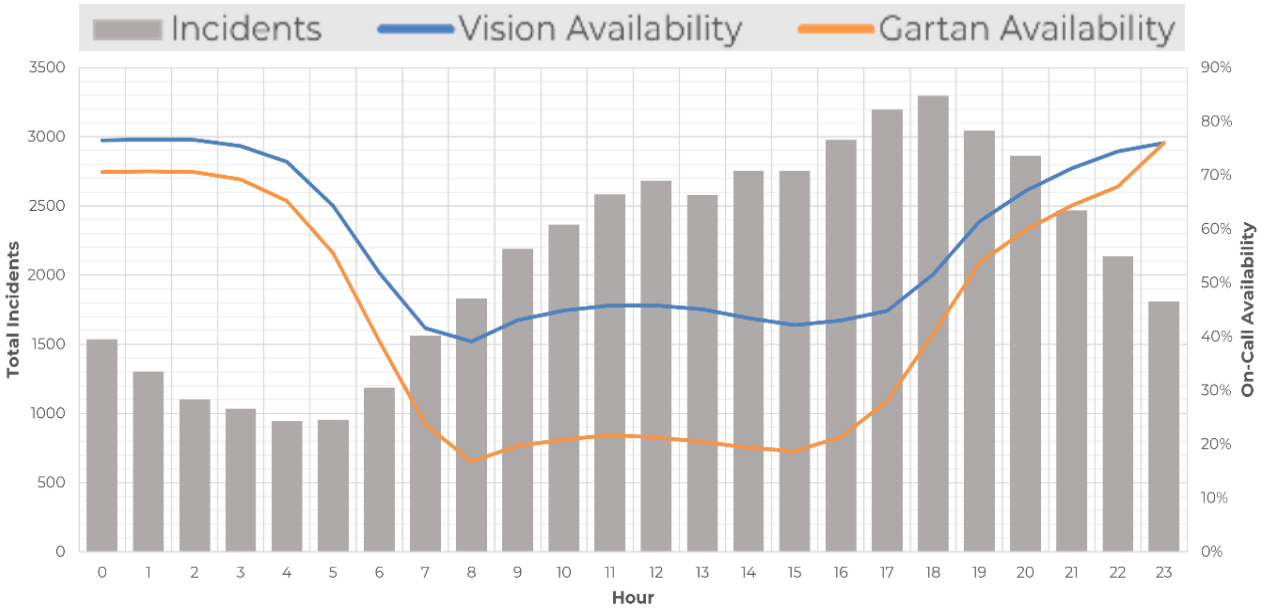


Figure 1 - OFRS Incident Demand and Fire Engine Availability by Hour

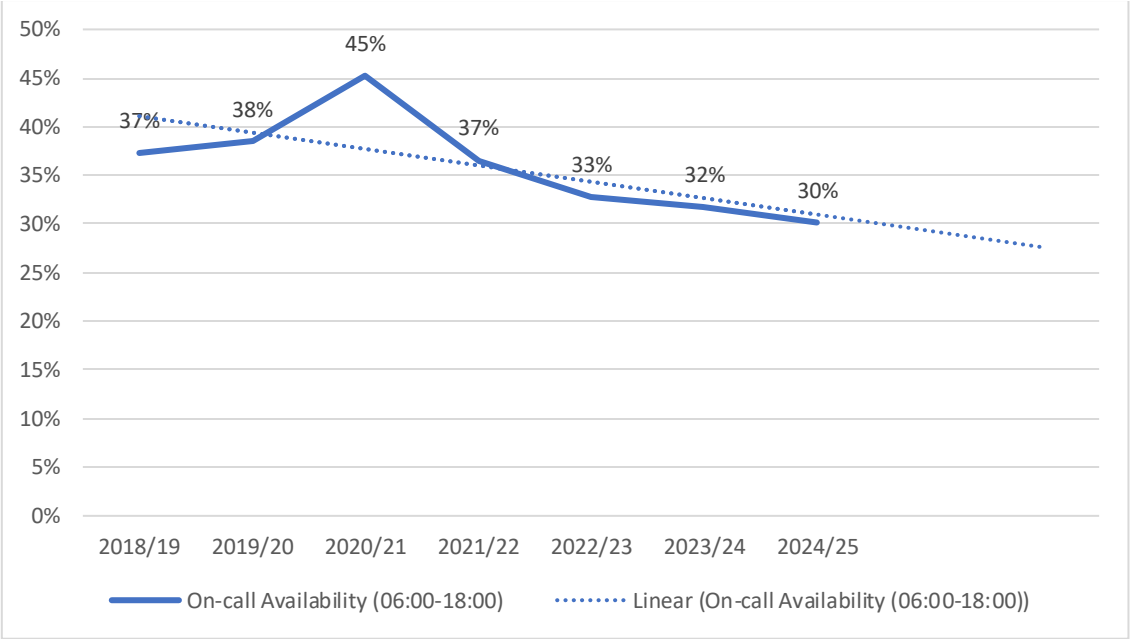


Figure 2 - On-call fire engine availability trend

19. During the day, the actual availability of on-call firefighters is down to 20%, negatively impacting response time performance over time as illustrated in figure 3 with response times to primary fires.

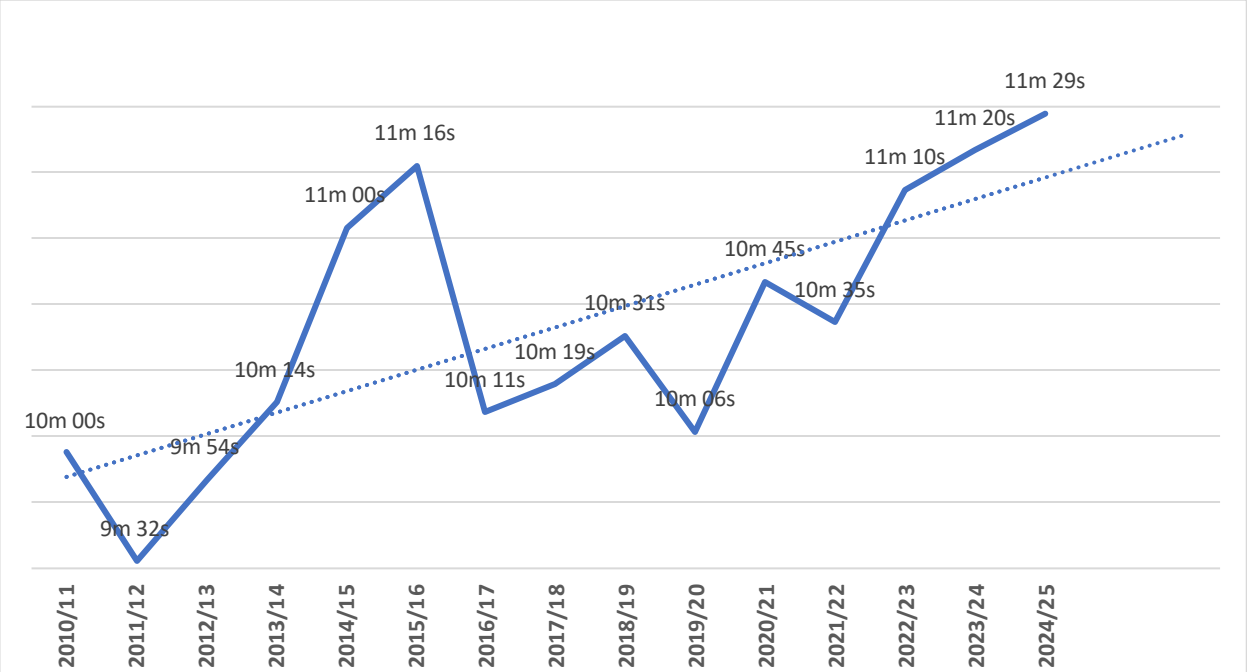


Figure 3 - OFRS response times trend to primary fires[6]

20. This is further supported by the HMICFRS, who as part of their 2023 State of Fire and Rescue report[7] stated that *"most services that they inspected were negatively affected by long-standing problems with availability of on-call staff, particularly during traditional office hours"* (p.29).

21. To manage risk effectively, including fluctuations in fire engine availability, OFRS reallocates resources such as wholetime employees or the second wholetime fire engine at Rewley Road across the county to address gaps caused by reduced on-call availability. If this is not possible or is not sufficient to address gaps in operational cover, additional cover is provided through overtime to ensure sufficient coverage. However, this method currently lacks efficiency and resilience, as the availability of employees able to work overtime cannot be guaranteed. The use of overtime also involves a huge organisational opportunity cost through people and systems being deployed to manage availability instead of other potentially more valuable work.

22. Figure 4 illustrates on-call availability before additional cover support ('Gartan') and with additional cover support ('Vision'). Most of the additional cover (an estimated 84%) at on-call stations takes place between 07:00 and 19:00hrs, which is also when emergency response demand is higher.

[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fire-statistics-data-tables#response-times
[7] https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/state-of-fire-and-rescue-annual-assessment-2023/

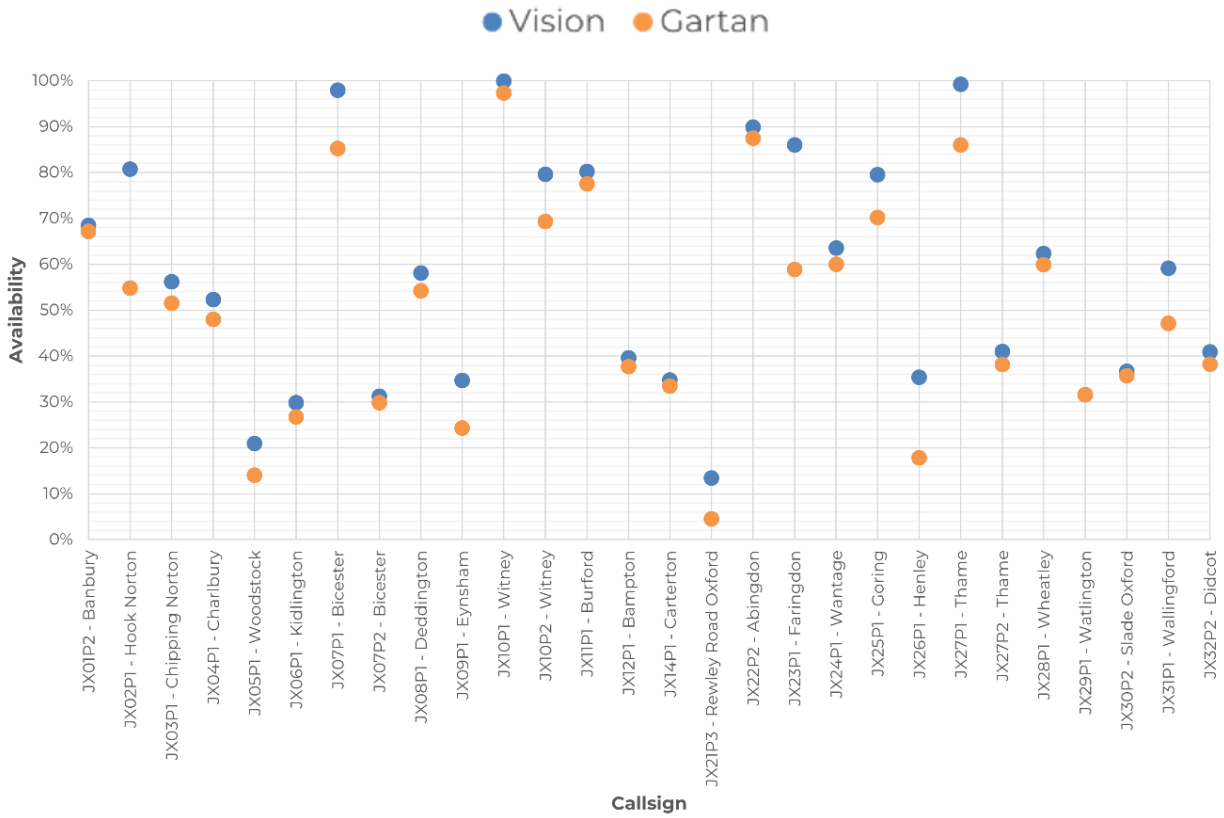


Figure 4: On-Call availability by fire engine

23. OFRS has two long-held emergency response standards which were reaffirmed by the Fire Authority in the latest Community Risk Management Plan[8] (CRMP). The standards are:

- 80% of incidents to be attended by a fire engine within 11 minutes
- 95% of incidents to be attended by a fire engine within 14 minutes

The performance against these standards is shared annually via the Fire and Rescue Annual Report.

24. The average response time for attendance at an emergency incident in Oxfordshire by a fire service vehicle is reported quarterly to the Cabinet and the public via the Business Management and Monitoring Report.

25. These response standards aim to provide a benchmark and recognise the distribution of OFRS resources throughout the county. However, on the basis that they include all incidents that we attend, they do not reflect the allocation of resources to manage relative risk. To ensure that the fire and rescue cover review focused on improving the response times to the highest risks (demand vs consequence), the service utilised four key incident response measures within the modelling that has been undertaken[9]. These are:

[8] https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fire-and-community-safety/oxfordshire-fire-and-rescue-service/community-risk-management-plan
[9] Fire statistics definitions - GOV.UK

(a) Primary Fires

Potentially more serious fires that cause harm to people or damage to property. To be categorised as primary these fires must either:

- occur in a (non-derelict) building, vehicle or (some) outdoor structures
- involve fatalities, casualties or rescues
- be attended by 5 or more fire engines

(b) Dwelling Fires

Dwelling fires are a subset of primary fires and are fires in properties that are a place of residence that is, places occupied by households such as houses and flats, excluding hotels/hostels and residential institutions; dwellings also include non-permanent structures used solely as a dwelling, such as houseboats and caravans.

(c) Commercial Fires

Commercial fires are a subset of primary fires and are fires in other residential or non-residential buildings; other (institutional) residential buildings include properties such as hostels/hotels/B&Bs, nursing/care homes, student halls of residence; non-residential buildings include properties such as offices, shops, factories, warehouses, restaurants, public buildings, religious buildings.

(d) Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs)

Road Traffic collision are incidents that require the attendance of OFRS for collisions involving road vehicles, this includes large and small vehicles including motorbikes.

26. Each measure is evaluated by both service-wide response and district area response times. This assessment covers day, night, and overall impacts, as well as the average response times for the first and second fire engines. First fire engine response times are used to gauge the amount of time between a 999 call being made and when the public receive resources on scene to assist them in the emergency. Second fire engine response times are also important for community safety from a level of response perspective as multiple fire engines will be needed to resolve certain incidents. They tend to be used to gauge how quickly firefighters will receive support on scene and therefore are also about firefighter safety.

27. As previously mentioned, fire engine availability in the service is currently at its highest during periods of low demand and at its lowest during periods of high demand. Currently, the only virtually guaranteed fire cover consists of four wholetime 24 shift fire engines and three wholetime day-crewing fire engines. The reduction in on-call availability hours has an impact on response times. Due to limited on-call availability during periods of high demand, the service may not be able to provide consistent support for routine operations or for events that require substantial resources, such as severe weather occurrences or prolonged large-scale incidents.

28. OFRS maintains six wholetime stations[10] located in key urban areas of Oxfordshire. Three of these operate a 24-hour shift system known as '2-2-4' whereby employees are assigned to one of four watches, working a 42-hour week involving two ten-hour day shifts followed by two 14-hour night shifts. The stations operating this shift system are based in Oxford City (Rewley Road and Slade Park Fire Stations) and one in Banbury. Three wholetime stations, Abingdon, Didcot, and Kidlington, operate on a day-crewing system, which uses fewer employees than the 2-2-4 system. Wholetime employees at these day-crewing stations are provided with housing that enable them to respond to the fire station during the night to provide a 24/7 virtually guaranteed resource. This wholetime fire station framework provides resilient wholetime assets extending through the centre of Oxfordshire from north to south (see figure 3).

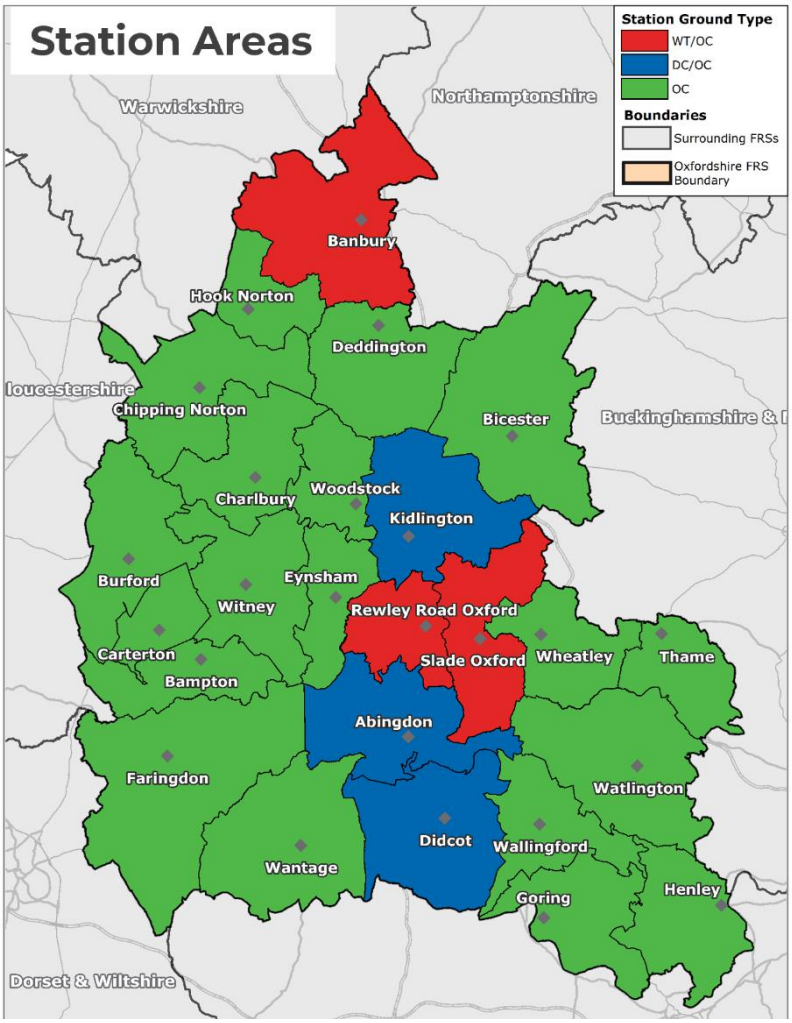


Figure 4 - Map of Oxfordshire fire station existing crewing models

29. The wholetime 2-2-4 shift system at Banbury, Rewley Road, and Slade Park currently operates the following shifts:

(a) Two 10-hour day shifts commencing at 08:15hrs and concluding at 18:15hrs.
(b) Two 14-hour night shifts commencing at 18:15hrs and concluding at 08:15hrs.

[10] All wholetime stations also have on-call crews to provide additional resilience.

(c) These stations also have an additional fire engine crewed by firefighters on the on-call duty system.

30. The wholetime day-crewing shift system at Abingdon, Didcot and Kidlington, provide 24/7 availability via a 12-hour day shift rota (including standby hours) supplemented with a 12 hour on-call rota that is performed by those wholetime employees. Abingdon and Didcot also have an additional fire engine crewed by firefighters on the on-call duty system. Kidlington has a crew of on-call firefighters that dual crew the fire engine with the wholetime firefighters.

31. To assist on-call stations with staffing, recruitment, training, and prevention and protection activities, OFRS assigns wholetime watch managers (eight personnel), referred to as Station Support Officers (SSOs), to groups of on-call stations. Additionally, there are three crew managers who act as Regional Support Managers (RSMs) whose main responsibility is to ensure on-call availability and, if necessary, staff on-call fire engines.

Financial Drivers for Change

32. Whilst the primary driver for this review is the long-term decline in on-call availability and increasing response times, the service is also committed to achieving greater value for money including constantly looking for ways to use its funding differently to improve the services it provides to the public.

33. Preliminary work as part of this review identified that between during the 2021, 2022 and 2023 calendar years, the service spent an average of **£344.5k** annually on additional staff payments for appliance availability across all the service's duty systems and stations. This equates to approximately 1.5% of the fire and rescue service's overall revenue budget which could be put to a different use in support of a more effective and efficient operating model.

34. The service has overspent its budget in recent years (£75k overspent in 2022/23, £857k in 2023/24 and £784k in 2024/25). With the service being forecasted to follow this trend for 2025/26 and likely going forwards, it is imperative that we identify options to deliver our services within budget. This review therefore presents an opportunity to also identify cashable efficiencies to reduce that overspend.

35. Additionally, in alignment with the National Spending Review in 2021 and 2024, fire services have strategically committed to enhancing wholetime firefighter productivity by 3% and achieving 2% non-pay efficiency savings (cashable or non-cashable) annually. This review therefore also presents an opportunity to identify non-cashable efficiencies that could be reinvested within the service in the support of more effective services.

Urban Growth

36. Strong population and economic growth linked to Oxfordshire's status as a leading global centre for science, technology, and higher education is driving urban growth in the county. The region is experiencing significant investment and development in key areas like the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor. However, whilst Oxford city itself has seen slower population growth, population growth in surrounding rural districts is greater, partly driven by the planning constraints that limit development in Oxford.

37. Over the next decade, population and housing growth in Oxfordshire will be concentrated in several key areas, and in part to meet unmet housing needs from Oxford city. This presents challenges to OFRS on the basis that this growth will continue to create increased community risk in locations that are further way from our existing fire station locations. This will mean that there is a risk of our response times increasing over time unless we optimise our emergency response model.

Community safety work capacity

38. The service is currently restricted in its ability to deliver community safety work, particularly in Oxfordshire's rural and lower population density urban communities. Whilst the primary aim of the review was to identify proposals for a new emergency response model, it was considered that the review could also provide an opportunity to improve the service's capacity to deliver community safety work, such as prevention/protection activities as well as to assist with the management of operational risk information which supports our emergency response activity.

Additional Background Information

39. The options set out in this paper propose changes to the way in which some fire engines are crewed using a set of key principles which are as follows:

- The reallocation of full-time (wholetime) firefighters at nighttime to their deployment during the daytime at various stations to provide more resilient daytime fire engine availability and to improve firefighter productivity during the day in activities such as prevention work.
- Increased reliance on on-call firefighters at night when their availability is very good.
- Achieving more equal emergency response performance between high-density urban areas and low-density rural areas to ensure consistent daytime fire engine coverage and improved response times in both lower population urban and rural communities.

40. New shift opportunities will increase daytime capacity for enhanced prevention initiatives through safe and well visits, safety campaigns such as road safety and water safety, school engagements, and support for partnership events. Additionally, it will promote business fire safety benefits by providing opportunities to assist with the regulation of buildings to which the Fire Safety Order 2005 applies

and improve our capacity to collect risk information about premises which is a requirement of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004[11].

41. The Fire and Rescue Cover Model Review encompasses a review of the structure and budget associated with the operational fire station establishment, comprising uniformed OFRS employees who operate at Firefighter, Crew Manager and Watch Manager level and are on the National Joint Council (NJC) scheme of conditions and are eligible for membership of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

OPTIONS FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION

42. OFRS is proposing eight options for public consultation. It should be emphasised that these recommendations are largely independent of each other and can be implemented separately. However, option 1 is the core option on to which all subsequent options are layers. All response performance data for subsequent options therefore include option 1 as well. A summary table comparing the options is provided in the **Appendix**appendix.

43. The financial consequences of these options are documented here and then summarised within the 'Financial Implications' section of this paper.

Option 1(a & b)

44. **Option 1(a) – The implementation of five 12-hour wholetime day shifts on current on-call stations (Core Option).**

45. **Option 1(b) - The implementation of five 12-hour wholetime day shifts on current on-call stations as per option 1(a) to include move of Wallingford Fire Station to Crowmarsh.**

46. These options would introduce the following changes:

(a) The implementation of a 12-hour wholetime day shift system at Chipping Norton, Faringdon and Wallingford (1a)/Crowmarsh (1b) to crew the fire engine during the day with the current on-call crews crewing the fire engine at night. This would enable local on-call crews to direct recruitment efforts toward covering nighttime hours.

(b) The implementation of a 12-hour wholetime day shift system at both Bicester and Witney to crew the first fire engine in the day with the current on-call crews crewing the second fire engine during the day and both fire engines at night.

47. OFRS current wholetime station establishment figure is 154 roles, ranging from Firefighter to Watch Manager. In addition to this, there are 11 Station Support Officers (SSOs) and Regional Support Managers (RSMs). To optimise the

[11] Section 7(2)(d) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires fire and rescue authorities to make arrangements for obtaining risk information.

distribution of wholetime fire engines, it is proposed to reassign the station/regional support roles and adjust staffing levels at existing wholetime stations.

48. It is proposed that the service changes its current station establishment from 28 to 24 personnel for stations on the 2-2-4 shift duty system and 14 to 12 personnel for the new day shift duty systems and Kidlington which is on the day-crewing system, with Abingdon and Didcot already at 12.

49. The modelling has demonstrated that reallocating employees from the second wholetime fire engine at Rewley Road and redistributing these employees to support the implementation of the 12-hour day shifts results in improved response times.

50. The proposed crewing changes would enable the service to reassign 57 employees to five 12-hour day shift stations.

51. Three additional full-time equivalent posts would be needed to supplement the existing 57 posts to support the station establishment proposals.

52. The reallocation of personnel from the second fire engine at Rewley Road would facilitate a reduction in the fire engine fleet. This adjustment would also result in the reduction of one wholetime fire engine during nighttime operations, thereby decreasing the number of wholetime assets from seven to six at night.

53. The service's Property and Emergency Response Strategy[12] has already set in motion a project to replace the fire station at Rewley Road with a smaller fire station with two appliance bays at the same location. The plan is expected to bring in **£22.4M** by selling part of the land at Rewley Road to developers. Building a new fire station on the site, along with a training centre at Grandpont is estimated to cost **£15.19M**.

54. However, the reduction in the fleet through a combination of this option and option 3 would enable a new fire station at Rewley Road to be designed to house one fire engine. An options appraisal has demonstrated that this would enable a training venue to be built on the existing Rewley site which would also facilitate the release of the Oxford Grandpont site, previously reallocated for the building of a fire and rescue service training facility, for alternative use. Currently, the build costs for this are estimated to be **£14.068M**. This option would also involve the hosting of the high reach appliance (hydraulic platform) at Slade Park Fire Station. A separate service review would be needed along with **£3.1 million** to cover the cost of changes at Slade Park Fire Station.

55. To facilitate the implementation of wholetime day shifts at the identified stations, it would be necessary to undertake property improvements. These improvements will ensure that the facilities meet the operational requirements and provide a suitable working environment for staff working full-time shifts.

[12] See 'Community Safety Services (CSS), Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (OFRS), Property and Emergency Response Strategy', September 2023

56. **Benefits of option 1(a) and 1(b)**

(a) The trend of reducing hours worked by on-call firefighters primarily impacts daytime availability. This option would help to mitigate this issue with the five new 12-hour day shift fire engines providing a guaranteed 11 wholetime fire engines during the day, thus improving fire engine availability and response times during peak incident periods. The modelling shows an improved mean first response time to primary fires and RTCs by **1 minute and 46 seconds** during the day (08:00 – 20:00hrs) and by **1 second** at night. This change is also forecast to improve the mean second response time by **48 seconds** during the day.

(b) There would be a reduction in the costs associated with providing additional cover at on-call stations, with the biggest requirement for intervention being between 07:00 and 19:00 when it is estimated that 84% of all additional cover hours are provided.

(c) The change would provide greater parity in emergency response performance between higher population density urban areas and lower density rural areas with an improvement in lower density urban and rural response times. It is anticipated that greater parity in response times would also result in more parity with respect to incident outcomes (such as fire spread/damage in buildings) based on incident analysis conducted as part of this review. Currently, as the most densely populated area, Oxford City receives an overall mean response time of 8 minutes and 15 seconds for primary fires and RTCs, with the next quickest being Vale of White Horse with 12 minutes and 41 seconds, and the slowest being South Oxfordshire with 14 minutes and 8 seconds. Although, the change would have a slight adverse impact on the average Oxford City fire response time with an increase of 11 seconds overall, Oxford would still receive the fastest response time of the five local authority districts.

(d) Five new wholetime day shifts would enhance firefighter productivity by increasing the capacity during the day by 57 percent[13] for community activities, such as prevention, protection and risk information work, as well as other areas such as hydrant testing and inspection. These activities aim to improve safety for both firefighters and the community, reducing overall risk across the county.

(e) There would be workplace improvements and environmental benefits from the building of a new carbon efficient station in the Crowmarsh area, improving the county's building portfolio and reducing its carbon footprint.

(f) The reallocation of 46 employees from the traditional 2-2-4 shift system to a 12-hour day shift will provide more capacity in the daytime for productive community safety work.

(g) The reduction of a fire engine would result in annual maintenance efficiencies and remove the need for future fire engine and equipment replacement costs. The removal of the fire engine would result in a net reduction in the mileage

[13] 11 fire engines crewed by wholetime crews in the days compared to the current number of 7 wholetime crews.

undertaken by fire engines and therefore result in a reduction in fuel consumption and emissions/carbon footprint.

57. **Impacts of option 1(a) and 1(b)**

(a) There would be an additional revenue cost owing to three additional FTE posts being required and the increase in supervisory managers needed. There would also be capital costs associated with funding the necessary building improvements to enable the transition to day shift and for the building of a new Wallingford fire station in the Crowmarsh area.

(b) There is a potential for firefighters who only provide day cover to be made redundant from their on-call contract unless they can transition to an alternative nighttime contract or to an alternative on-call station.

(c) The change would see an increase to the mean second fire engine response time to primary fires and RTCs by **32 seconds** at night (20:00 - 08:00hrs).

(d) This option is forecast to slightly increase the response time in Oxford City with the first fire engine taking longer to get to primary fires and RTCs by **11 seconds** overall **(10 seconds in the day, 13 seconds at night)** and the second fire engine by between **2 minutes 1 second and 2 minutes 4 seconds.**

(e) If there are fewer people at each station, it means there is less flexibility when someone is off sick or on leave, so it is possible for crewing levels to drop below what is needed to keep fire engines available. This likelihood will be reduced by reviewing current policies that can impact on crewing levels including training days and leave allocation.

(f) The number of virtually guaranteed fire engine resources at night would decrease from seven to six but the remaining 27 fire engines would be staffed by on-call firefighters.

58. **Financial implications of options 1(a) and 1(b)**

(a) The establishment levels with respect to FTE posts is slightly higher overall for this option compared with the current response model with three additional FTE posts being required. The overall establishment revenue costs required for this new model are therefore greater. A significant factor in the scale of those increased establishment costs relate to the scope of the station-based watch manager roles and the resulting job evaluation and pay level. The minimum additional establishment revenue cost posed by this option are **£146.1k** with a maximum cost of **£267.1k**

(b) The creation of wholetime day shift stations in key locations across the county will result in a reduction in additional payments being made to operational employees to provide additional cover for additional pay[14]. It has been

[14] Different rates of pay are applied to additional cover hours depending on the terms and conditions that apply to the employee providing the cover.

estimated that potential pay-related revenue efficiencies of around **£305.4k per annum (£261.6k from wholetime salaries and £43.8k from on-call pay)** could be delivered. There would be additional savings from a reduction in daytime on-call cover payments, but these have not been assessed at this stage.

(c) This option reduces the total fire engine fleet by one which would deliver annual revenue efficiencies for the service's fleet replacement programme. It is estimated that this would result in an annual efficiency of around of **£31.6k**. Additionally, it would bring forward the sale of a fire engine from the fleet to deliver a one-off receipt of around **£10k**.

(d) Option 1(b) would require capital investment to deliver a new fire station at Crowmarsh and would be subject to being able to obtain a suitable site. Whilst an options appraisal has not been completed at this stage, it is estimated that the project would require capital investment of around **£7M**, offset by a capital receipt of around **£250k** for the current Wallingford Fire Station site.

(e) Capital investment to deliver day shift fire station property improvements estimated at around **£2M** would be required.

59. The reduction in fire engine fleet, together with option 3, means the new Rewley Road fire station can be built for one fire engine. This is expected to cost **£14.068M** with a potential change risk cost of **£305k**, which is **£0.8M less** than the previous building plan. The funding would come from the proposed sale of part of the land to developers for **£22.4M.**

Option 2

60. **The building of a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to combine Rewley Road and Kidlington fire stations, as well as the headquarters at Kidlington.**

61. This review has taken the opportunity to look at the decision that was made with respect to replacing the fire station at Rewley Road with a smaller fire station with two appliance bays at the same location (see par. 53). The feasibility of constructing a new fire station at Rewley Road in the area suggested by developers has always been conditional on the results of the Fire and Rescue Cover Model Review. Following the completion of the review, the model indicated that a new Oxford fire station could be established towards the north of Oxford, while still improving current response times.

62. This option would introduce the following changes:

(a) Release the whole of the Rewley Road site for sale and releasing a capital receipt.

(b) Release of the Oxford Grandpont site, previously reallocated for the building of a fire and rescue service training facility, for alternative use and benefit to the community.

(c) The building of a new fire station towards the north of Oxford that would house initially one 24/7 wholetime fire engine from the existing Rewley Road fire station. This station would also host the hydraulic platform which would require a separate internal review to consider further.

(d) Once the new station is built, the fire engine would transition from Kidlington fire station to the new station. This would provide a second fire engine that would be staffed by wholetime firefighters working a 12-hour shift in the day and on-call employees at night, with the on-call employees being transferred and permanently relocated from Kidlington Fire Station.

(e) The headquarters at the existing Kidlington Fire Station site would be moved to the new fire station. Some short-term retention of the storage and vehicle workshops areas at the rear of the current Kidlington site would likely need to be retained in the short to medium term as part of this transition with a medium-term capital receipt being released later.

63. **Benefits of option 2**

(a) Response times for the first fire engine arriving at primary fires and road traffic collisions during the day (08:00 to 20:00) are expected to get faster by **1 minute and 51 seconds** when this change is made, if option 1a or 1b is also followed.

(b) It is also forecast to provide a quicker fire engine response time at night with an improvement in first fire engine response of **21 seconds**. This change is also forecast to improve the mean second response time by **1 minute and 53 seconds** during the day when taken alongside option 1a or 1b.

(c) The consolidation of fire stations would offer significant environmental benefits through reducing the building portfolio, including the establishment of carbon-efficient facilities. This initiative would support the council's target of going beyond net zero with respect to carbon emissions.

(d) The zero-emission zone in Oxford aims to improve air quality, reduce carbon emissions, and promote zero emission travel. A new fire station towards the north of Oxford would reduce the need for employees to travel into central Oxford as well as reduce the need for more polluting fire engines from routinely driving in Oxford City centre, helping to improve air quality in Oxford.

(e) The transport links around the north of Oxford, including Oxford Parkway railway station, A34 and Oxford ring road links, would present opportunities for OFRS employees, external partners and other council employees.

(f) The Kidlington headquarters, fire station and associated day-crewing houses, as well as the full Rewley Road site could generate capital receipts that can be utilised to support OFRS and the council's wider property strategy.

(g) The removal of the need for day-crewing houses at Kidlington will result in revenue efficiencies for the county council, specifically associated with the maintenance of those properties. It will also free up capacity in the teams in OFRS and Property Services that support with the management and maintenance of the properties although this would be a marginal benefit with no opportunity to reduce the employee pay costs for those services.

64. **Impacts of option 2**

(a) The number of guaranteed fire engine resources at night would decrease from six to five due to the loss of day-crewing housing in Kidlington that presently enables one of the current fire engines to also be provided at night. The remaining 27 fire engines would be staffed by on-call firefighters.

(b) This option would slightly increase the average second fire engine response to primary fires and RTCs across Oxfordshire by **4 seconds** at night compared to the current response model. However, this would still be quicker than with the station being located at Rewley Road.

(c) This option is forecast to slightly increase the response time in Oxford City with the first fire engine taking longer to get to primary fires and RTCs by **48 seconds** overall **(47 seconds in the day, 51 seconds at night)** and the second fire engine by between **42 seconds and 1 minute 52 seconds**. However, it should be noted that the second fire engine response time is quicker in this option than in option 1a/1b.

(d) There is a potential that the service would need to find an alternative location for Rewley Road assets whilst transitioning to a new station which could have short-term impacts on emergency response times.

(e) This option would require us to transfer 14 wholetime employees to an alternative duty system and would require 12 of these employees to find alternative residential accommodation. However, in the event that this option was taken forward to implementation, a lengthy notice period would be provided.

(f) This operating model would create an opportunity to review the service's specialist rescue capabilities which are currently delivered via the rescue tender from Kidlington Fire Station. This would need to be reviewed through an in-service review with employee engagement.

65. **Financial implications of option 2**

(a) Recommendation 2 would result in the combination of two fire stations into one (Rewley Road and Kidlington into a single station). This should therefore reduce the overall cost of the building portfolio within OFRS.

(b) This recommendation would also result in capital receipts for the full Rewley Road site as well as for the Kidlington Headquarters site and the associated 14 day-crewing houses at Kidlington. Estimated capital receipts for these

sites are a total of **£31.6M of which £7.3M is already committed under the existing capital programme**. A new fire station towards the north of Oxford is estimated to represent a build cost **£25M plus one-off sale costs of £100k for Kidlington related buildings** with the land being pursued through a S106[15] agreement.

(c) Assuming that call-out costs would be distributed to firefighters on the on-call duty system, this recommendation would result in the removal of on-call retainer payments to employees on the wholetime duty system at Kidlington. This would result in annual revenue efficiencies of around **£40k** per annum.

(d) There would be annual reductions in the cost of maintaining the housing with the disposal of the housing at Kidlington. It is estimated that this would save around **£67.7k** per annum in maintenance and council tax costs.

(e) This recommendation might result in a need to remove the existing Specialist Rescue Team and the removal of the rescue tender from the fleet replacement programme. This might therefore require the service to redistribute the specialist rescue capabilities to other stations. The exact scope for achieving this has not yet been determined and the intention would be to co-design a new specialist rescue model with our employees. However, an estimated one-off upfront cost to achieve this has been estimated to be **£213.3k** with annual maintenance costs of **£16.7k**. These costs would be partially offset by efficiencies to the fleet replacement programme of an estimated **£37k** per annum (excluding direct and indirect annual maintenance costs) as well as operational equipment replacement and maintenance costs which have not been assessed at this stage. Additionally, it would bring forward the sale of the rescue tender from the fleet to deliver a one-off receipt of around **£10k**.

Option 3

66. **The removal of Rewley Road On-Call fire engine.**

67. The analysis identified that between July 2022 and March 2024, Rewley Road on-call provided less than five percent availability during the day and only nine percent availability at night. Based on these availability figures, removing this fire engine has no impact on the service-wide mean first and second response performance.

68. Over a five-year period, the Rewley Road on-call fire engine attended around 22 incidents a year. The removal of this fire engine is projected to have no significant impact to the service-wide mean first response time to primary fires and RTCs.

[15] Section 106 (S106) Agreements are legal agreements made between Local Authorities and developers under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The agreements are linked to planning permissions and can also be known as planning obligations.

69. **Benefits of option 3**

(a) The reduction of a fire engine would result in annual maintenance cost efficiencies and remove the need for future fire engine and equipment replacement costs. The removal of the on-call fire engine will result in a net reduction in the mileage undertaken by fire engines and therefore result in a reduction in fuel consumption and emissions/carbon footprint.

(b) This change will provide efficiencies through a reduction in costs associated with training, recruitment, occupational health, workwear and personal protective equipment. It will also create capacity to the teams that are involved in providing these functions.

70. **Impacts of option 3**

(a) Seven firefighters would be made redundant from their on-call contract unless they are able to transition to an alternative on-call station.

(b) There could be a perception that this would impact the response to Oxford City and Oxfordshire more widely. However, it should be noted, that owing to the ability to recruit and retain sufficient staffing, this fire engine has predominantly been unavailable to respond to emergency incidents.

71. **Financial implications of option 3**

(a) This option reduces the total fire engine fleet by one which would deliver annual revenue efficiencies for the service's fleet replacement programme. It is estimated that this would result in an annual saving of around **£31.6k**. Additionally, it would bring forward the sale of a fire engine from the fleet to deliver a one-off receipt of around **£10k**.

(b) This option would result in small reductions in the service's pay as well as associated costs (Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), workwear etc) amounting to an estimated **£56k** per annum.

(c) This option would involve some upfront one-off redundancy costs to be met which are estimated to be around **£13.4k**.

Option 4

72. **The removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station.**

73. This option recommends the removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station due to consistently low availability.

74. Over a five-year period, Thame's second fire engine attended on average 17 incidents a year in Oxfordshire (and 12 incidents in other counties). The removal of Thame's second fire engine is projected to have no significant impact to the service-wide mean first response time to primary fires and RTCs.

75. **Benefits of option 4**

(a) The reduction of a fire engine would result in annual maintenance cost efficiencies and remove the need for future fire engine and equipment replacement costs. The removal of the fire engine will result in a net reduction in the mileage undertaken by fire engines and therefore result in a reduction in fuel consumption and emissions/carbon footprint.

(b) The second fire engine's removal will allow the employees at Thame fire station to concentrate on staffing the first fire engine, helping to improve its availability.

(c) Given that the station is currently crewed for two fire engines, this change will mitigate the requirement for substantial investment in recruitment to continue the current staffing requirements and enable any such resources to be reallocated elsewhere.

76. **Impacts of option 4**

(a) The removal may affect morale, with some employees possibly deciding to leave the on-call service.

(b) Although there is no impact to the service wide mean first response time to primary fires and RTCs, there is an increase of **2 seconds** to the overall mean second response time.

77. **Financial impacts of option 4**

(a) This option reduces the total fire engine fleet by one which would deliver annual revenue efficiencies for the service's fleet replacement programme. It is estimated that this would result in an annual saving of around of **£31.6k**. Additionally, it would bring forward the sale of a fire engine from the fleet to deliver a one-off receipt of around **£10k**.

(b) This option would also reduce the long-term employee establishment need for the station, which would have a marginal impact on the staffing costs of the service along with a reduction in associated costs such as training, workwear and PPE. However, no compulsory redundancies would be required.

Option 5

78. **Additional investment in the number of firefighters to maintain an additional fire engine 24/7 for Oxford.**

79. Subject to additional investment, this option enables the service to maintain the current number of wholetime 24/7 fire engines. This would further improve the service response times and provide additional resilience in fire engine numbers available, particularly overnight.

80. As a minimum, 12 additional staff would be required. This investment would enable a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to have a guaranteed second wholetime asset at night.

81. The optimal investment would be a further 24 firefighters. The additional firefighters could be utilised at Slade Park fire station providing a second fire engine 24/7 (in addition to the existing fire engine that is crewed by firefighters on the on-call duty system) or, at a new station towards the north of Oxford, providing two 24/7 fire engines and one 12-hour day shift.

82. **Benefits of option 5**

(a) The mean response time for the first and second fire engine to dwelling fires and RTCs is projected to improve by **7 seconds** and **1 minute and 8 seconds**, respectively.

(b) It would provide additional fire engine resilience, as well as staffing resilience.

(c) The investment of additional firefighters will help with the staffing of the high reach appliance.

83. **Impact of option 5**

(a) There will be additional revenue costs associated with the investment of 12 or 24 additional firefighters.

(b) A greater establishment would feed into indirect costs elsewhere in the service such as with respect to recruitment and training.

84. **Financial impacts of option 5**

(a) A change in establishment for option 5 would result in a need for a mixture of more firefighter, crew manager and watch managers depending on whether the investment was for 12 or 24 additional roles and require additional revenue. The resulting additional revenue costs would also be dependent on whether the watch manager roles were subsequently job evaluated at watch manager A rates or watch manager B rates.

(b) The minimum additional revenue cost posed by the investment options would be **£670.5k** per annum and the maximum would be **£1.28M** per annum.

Option 6

85. **Additional investment in the number of firefighters to maintain watch employee establishments at current levels.**

(a) Subject to additional investment, this option enables the service to deliver option 1 without reducing watch establishments (see par. 48) and maintaining current establishments.

(b) As a minimum, 28 additional staff would be required.

86. **Benefits of option 6**

(a) Watches would be better able to manage the impacts of unplanned staff absence.

(b) There would be a reduced need to bring in extra staff to keep fire engines available, making the service more reliable overall and helping to keep overtime levels as low as possible.

87. **Impact of option 6**

(a) There will be additional revenue costs associated with the investment of at least 28 additional firefighters.

(b) A greater establishment would feed into indirect costs elsewhere in the service such as with respect to recruitment and training.

88. **Financial impacts of option 6**

(a) A change in establishment for option 6 would result in a need for more firefighter roles. The resulting additional revenue costs would be dependent on other supported options and whether watch manager roles were subsequently job evaluated at watch manager A rates or watch manager B rates.

(b) The minimum additional revenue cost posed by this investment option would be **£1.26M** per annum.

Option 7

89. **Additional investment in the establishment to retain nine station support officers (SSOs).**

(a) Subject to additional investment, this option enables the service to deliver option 1 without removing SSOs (see par. 48).

(b) As a minimum, funding for nine Watch Manager (B) posts would be required.

90. **Benefits of option 7**

(a) The provision of SSOs reduces the workloads that would otherwise be imposed on on-call managers, helping to reduce the burden placed on those part-time roles and thereby helping to maximise staff retention.

(b) SSOs should enable the efficient and effective management of fire stations, reducing the burden of station managers.

91. **Impact of option 7**

(a) There will be additional revenue costs associated with the investment of nine watch manager posts (WM(B) rates)

(b) A greater establishment would feed into indirect costs elsewhere in the service such as with respect to recruitment and training.

92. **Financial impacts of option 7**

(a) The additional revenue cost posed by this investment option would be **£621k** per annum.

Option 8

93. **The potential closure of three on-call fire stations**

94. The review has identified the potential for the closure of one, two, or three fire stations due to persistently low on-call availability. Such closure would have minimal impact on service-wide response performance. The three stations identified are Eynsham, Henley, and Woodstock stations.

95. **Eynsham Fire Station -** Between July 2022 and March 2024, Eynsham on-call provided 17 percent availability during the day and only 34 percent availability at night. Over a five-year period, Eynsham's fire engine attended around 51 incidents a year. The removal of Eynsham's fire station would result in a **1 second** increase in the service-wide first and second fire engine overall response time to primary fires and RTCs.

96. **Henley Fire Station -** Between July 2022 and March 2024, Henley on-call provided 9 percent availability during the day and 25 percent availability at night. Over a five-year period, Henley's fire engine attended on average 66 incidents a year in Oxfordshire. Removing Henley's fire station would increase the service-wide first fire engine response time to primary fires and RTCs by **2 seconds** overall. Second fire engine response times are forecast to increase across Oxfordshire **1 second** if this option were taken.

97. **Woodstock Fire Station -** Between July 2022 and March 2024, Woodstock on-call provided 5 percent availability during the day and 26 percent availability at night. Over a five-year period, Woodstock's fire engine attended around 11 incidents a year. Removing Woodstock's fire station would increase the service-wide first fire engine response time to primary fires and RTCs by **1 second** overall. Second fire engine response times are forecast to increase across Oxfordshire by **1 second** if this option were taken.

98. **Benefits of option 8**

(a) There will be several revenue saving opportunities.

(b) There will be potential capital receipts through the sale of sites.

(c) The reduction of one, two or three fire engines will result in annual maintenance cost efficiencies and mitigate the need for future purchases of new fire engines and equipment.

(d) Reducing the number of sites will bring environmental benefits, as well as helping to improve the council's carbon footprint.

99. **Impacts of option 8**

(a) This change if implemented will see the removal of either one, two or three fire engines. This will be a reduction in the number of fire engines that could be utilised during the periods that they are available.

(b) Challenges with selling the sites - Henley and Woodstock both have telecommunication equipment at each site mounted on the training towers for which the council receive a small income. Although there is a break clause, it cannot be actioned until 2029. Even with the break clause, the County Council is required to work with the operator for 18 months to try to find an on-site solution. If no solution can be found, they must vacate.

(c) This change, if implemented, would result in firefighters from the affected stations being made redundant from their on-call contract unless they are able to transition to an alternative on-call station.

100. **Financial impacts of option 8**

(a) The closure of fire stations would result in several revenue efficiencies, as well as some potential capital receipts if the fire stations/sites were sold. The following are categories of potential revenue efficiencies and costs that have been assessed as part of this paper:

- Headcount and pay savings
- Training efficiencies
- Fire engine and operational equipment replacement savings
- Property related savings
- PPE and uniform savings
- Redundancy costs

(b) It is estimated that the overall annual employee-related revenue efficiencies that could be delivered through the closure of Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock are **£241.7k**, **£165.8k** and **£171.5k** respectively.

(c) The council would be liable to meet one-off redundancy revenue costs associated for any member of staff that was unable to relocate to another fire station. These one-off costs have been estimated to be **£42.8k** for Eynsham, **£43.2k** for Henley and **£73.5k** for Woodstock.

(d) Option 8 would result in one or more fire stations being closed. It has been estimated by Property Services that the capital receipts generated, together with sale costs, for these three sites would be as per table 1.

(e) This option would reduce the total fire engine fleet by one, two or three vehicles which would deliver annual revenue efficiencies for the service's fleet replacement programme. It is estimated that this would result in an annual fleet saving of around of **£31.6k per station closure** together with one-off receipts of around **£10k** for the sale of each of those vehicles.

Table 1 - Estimated capital receipts for identified station closures

Station closure	Est. capital receipt	Sale Costs
Woodstock Fire Station	**£450k**	**£7k**
Eynsham	**£150k**	**£2k**
Henley	**£600k**	**£9k**

101. Table 2 summarises the financial implications of the options is provided.

Table 2 - Summary of revenue and capital financial implications ***(these numbers are indicative to support decision making around direction of travel)***

*Difference in cost relates to the type of Watch Manager A or B

Option	Capital One off costs/ (savings) £	Revenue One off costs/(savings) £	Revenue Annual Costs/ (Savings)£ Min *	Revenue Annual Costs/ (Savings) £ Max *
Previously approved property strategy for the redevelopment of Rewley Road Fire Station (Including Option 3)				
Current Rewley Road build	£14,068,000			
Rewley Road potential change risk	£305,000			
Sale of Rewley surplus land	(£22,400,000)			
Committed Rewley sales receipt (Including Fire Station improvement £3.1m)	£7,332,000			
Strategy Total	**(£695,000)**			
Option 1 - Implementation of a 12-Hour day shift				
Establishment costs			£146,100	£267,100
Reduced overtime costs			(£305,400)	(£305,400)
Reduced fleet costs		(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)
Day shift fire station improvements	£2,000,000			
***Option 1 Total* Part A**	**£1,305,000**	**(£10,000)**	**(£190,900)**	**(£69,900)**
Options 1 Part B: Wallingford Fire Station move	£7,000,000	(£250,000)		
Option 1 Total	**£8,305,000**	**(£260,000)**	**(£190,900)**	**(£69,900)**
Option 2 - Building a new fire station towards north of Oxford combining Rewley Road & Kidlington Fire station/ Head Quarters				
New Rewley Road sale price	(£25,000,000)			
Kidlington HQ (Excluding Workshop)	(£2,000,000)	£30,000		
Kidlington Crew Housing	(£4,600,000)	£69,000		
Rewley Road potential change risk	£305,000			
New north Oxford station build	£25,000,000			
Revised specialist rescue model		£203,300	(£128,000)	(£128,000)
Temporary Rewley Road alternative location		TBC		

Option 2 Total – Standalone excluding Option 1a/b	**(£6,295,000)**	**£302,300**	**(£128,000)**	**(£128,000)**
Plus Total Option 1 Part A	**(£4,295,000)**	**£292,300**	**(£318,900)**	**(£197,900)**
Plus Total Option 1 Part A + Part B	**£2,705,000**	**£42,300**	**(£318,900)**	**(£197,900)**
Option 3 - Removal of Rewley Road On -Call fire engine				
Reduced fleet costs		(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)
Reduced pay and associated employee costs			(£56,000)	(£56,000)
Redundancy costs		£13,400		
Option 3 Total	**£0**	**£3,400**	**(£87,600)**	**(£87,600)**
Option 4 - The removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station				
Reduced fleet costs		(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)
Option 4 Total	**£0**	**(£10,000)**	**(£31,600)**	**(£31,600)**
Option 5 - Additional investment in the number of firefighters to maintain an additional fire engine 24/7 for Oxford				
Establishment costs			£670,500	£1,280,000
Option Total	**£0**	**£0**	**£670,500**	**£1,280,000**
Option 6 - Additional investment in the number of firefighters to maintain watch employee establishments at current levels				
Establishment costs			£1,260,000	£1,260,000
Option Total	**£0**	**£0**	**£1,260,000**	**£1,260,000**
Option 7 – Additional investment in establishment to retain nine station support officers				
Establishment costs			**£621,000**	**£621,000**
Option Total	**£0**	**£0**	**£621,000**	**£621,000**
Option 8- The potential closure of three on-call fire stations				

Eynsham Fire Station	(£150,000)	£35,050	(£241,700)	(£241,700)
Henley Fire Station	(£600,000)	£42,200	(£165,800)	(£165,800)
Woodstock Fire Station	(£450,000)	£70,250	(£171,500)	(£171,500)
Consideration Total	**(£1,200,000)**	**£147,500**	**(£579,000)**	**(£579,000)**

Staff Consultation - New daytime shift changes

102. To implement the changes identified in the options section of this report, the service has evaluated complementary opportunities to improve the impacts of shift work. The review will therefore include consulting employees and trade union representatives on transitioning to a 12-hour day shift only pattern and aligning shift patterns to consistent start and finish times where possible. This decision is at the discretion of the Chief Fire Officer and will not form part of the public consultation process.

103. In accordance with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, OFRS must assess the risks posed to employees by work activities. We are also required to commit to implementing measures that are 'reasonably practicable' to eliminate or manage these risks. This encompasses considerations such as the number of hours worked and the scheduling of these hours.

104. The Health and Safety Executive's guidance on 'Managing Shiftwork'[16] advises that shifts longer than 12 hours should be avoided. They note that alertness and performance can decline during extended shifts, potentially increasing the risk of errors and accidents.

105. The modelling analysis has identified that the time frame between 06:30 and 19:30hrs has the lowest fire engine availability. Therefore, implementing 12-hour day shifts would effectively ensure that the service covers most of this period.

106. Implementing 12-hour shifts would boost productivity and create opportunities to expand our prevention and protection initiatives.

107. Additionally, the creation of new day shift opportunities would offer watch-based employees the opportunity to work on a pattern that excludes night work.

108. In July 2023, the National Fire Chiefs Council released a commissioned report that assessed the economic and social value of the UK fire and rescue services[17]. The analysis indicated that, on average, targeted home visits ('Safe and Well') lead to a reduction in the occurrence of accidental dwelling fires. It was noted that the gross return on investment for such activities is £2.67 for every £1 spent.

109. The implementation of a new 12-hour day shift system, along with the adjustment of shift pattern start and finish times, may introduce challenges for employees, including potential effects on personal circumstances. These matters will be carefully discussed and considered through the employee engagement and consultation processes.

[16] https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/hsg256.htm
[17] https://nfcc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ESV-UK-Fire-and-Rescue-Services-all-nations-FINAL.docx

Corporate Policies and Priorities

110. As alluded to in other parts of this paper, whilst the proposals and considerations outlined are intended primarily to result in improvements in Fire and Rescue service delivery, wider benefits that align with the county's corporate priorities would also result.

111. **The climate emergency** - The reduction in fire engines coupled with the rationalising and improvement of the fire station building portfolio will result in net reductions in the council's carbon footprint.

112. **Inequalities** – The creation of day shift fire stations in some of the more rural areas would provide the fire and rescue service with resources to help drive community safety initiatives in these areas and potentially provide the council with resources to help deliver to initiatives to address social, economic, health and educational inequalities.

113. **Health and Wellbeing** - The creation of day shift fire stations in some of the more rural areas would provide the fire and rescue service with greater resources to deliver the service's 'Safe and Well' interventions, supporting the council's drive to improve our residents' physical and mental wellbeing.

Property Implications

114. The freehold ownership of all but one of the fire stations lies with the council. Subject to planning or any required permissions, the council can carry out works to fire stations. In some instances, there are other occupiers on the fire station sites by way of a sub-lease. If there are to be changes to the site, or a potential disposal, the correct notice will need to be served. These notices often come with prescribed timescales.

115. Some of the considerations and recommendations above include property works. The cost of these can fluctuate as the market for materials changes and can be affected by market factors outside of the council's control.

116. Similarly, some of the considerations and recommendations above include property disposals to generate capital receipt. The amount of capital receipt, whilst estimated above, is subject to the prevailing market conditions at the time of any disposal. These estimates should not be relied upon as definitive sums.

Comments checked by:
Henry White, Property Services, Operational Manager for Assets & Investment
henry.white@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

117. This paper presents recommendations and considerations that would fundamentally affect individuals and teams within the Fire and Rescue Service. At this stage, the changes are proposed and either recommended for public consultation or for consideration for public consultation. Any effects on employees resulting from the implementation of recommendations following public consultation will be reviewed separately and addressed at the appropriate time.

The service will involve all Fire and Rescue employees and representative bodies in public consultation on recommendations to cabinet, encouraging their full participation.

Comments checked by:

Caroline Bing, Strategic People Partner, caroline.bing@oxfordshire.gov.uk (HR & Cultural Change)

Equality & Inclusion Implications

118. A draft equality impact assessment (EIA) has been prepared and will remain a live document throughout the public consultation process.

119. At this stage, the EIA indicates that the options detailed in this paper would create greater parity in emergency response performance across the county with performance improving in more rural areas and a minor reduction within Oxford City. While this greater parity in response performance may reduce service for more deprived Oxford communities, it is expected to address current inequalities and benefit rural areas of Oxfordshire.

Risk Management

120. At this stage, there are five areas of risk that have been identified in relation to the options within this paper as follows:

    a. Damage to the service's and council's reputation by proposing changes that have a fundamental impact on the way in which fire and rescue services are delivered in Oxfordshire. The business case underpinning the need for change is strong and therefore it is suggested that a comprehensive public consultation would enable the service to clearly communicate the risks associated with the current emergency response model and demonstrate that a 'do nothing' option is not viable.

b. Any major change programme will clearly risk impacting the morale of employees and risk damaging industrial relations. OFRS has very positive industrial relations and it will be paramount that the service invests in early, honest and proactive engagement with employees and their trade union representatives to allay concerns by being open to concerns and new ideas. The need to communicate to employees that they can influence the outcome of any public consultation is an important aspect of any subsequent communications and engagement strategy.

c. The options for change would result in increased emergency response times in Oxford City and across Oxfordshire at night and therefore involves a potential marginal worsening of community safety with respect to emergency incident outcomes. However, the service is proposing changes according to independent third-party modelling to ensure that the appropriate resources are allocated to the correct locations at the right time, with the goal of enhancing community safety overall and it is argued that the improvements in daytime response, when demand is highest, outweigh any marginal increase in nighttime risk.

d. Reduced fire engine resilience at night through an increased reliance on on-call resources could result in fire engine availability challenges if on-call availability reduces at nighttime in the same way as we see it currently trending in the day. The on-call system is currently very reliable during nighttime periods, and it is intended that some of the options for change will allow some on-call stations to focus more on their nighttime availability, further improving nighttime resilience.

e. The ability to deliver the property strategy associated with the options for change detailed in this paper is a risk due to the potential availability of capital funding, the ability to locate, access and secure land for new buildings, and the ability to secure planning permission with respect to new buildings, or to maximise the capital receipts for sites released. However, the opportunity for changes to the council building portfolio are believed to be compelling and the potential to release capital receipts to fund building investment with an increased overall value for money return is felt to be strong mitigation.

Appendix – Summary Modelling Comparison Table

	Option 1(a)(Core)	Option 1(b)(Core)	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5	Option 6	Option 7	Option 8
Proposal	**12-hour wholetime day shifts on current on-call stations**	**Option 1(a) plus move Wallingford Fire Station to Crowmarsh**	**North of Oxford fire station to combine Rewley Road and Kidlington**	**Removal of Rewley Road On-Call fire engine**	**Removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station**	**Investment to maintain an additional fire engine 24/7 for Oxford**	**Investment to maintain watch employee establishments at current levels**	**Investment to retain nine station support officers (SSOs)**	**Potential closure of three on-call fire stations**
Wholetime Stations Introduced	Day shift at: Chipping Norton, Bicester, Witney Faringdon & Wallingford	Day shift at: Crowmarsh	2-2-4 and day shift at North Oxford	None	None	None	None	None	None
New Stations	None	Crowmarsh	North Oxford	None	None	None	None	None	None
Station Closures, moves and combinations	None	(Move) Wallingford	(Combine) Rewley Road Kidlington	None	None	None	None	None	(Close) Woodstock Eynsham Henley
Number of Stations	25	25	24	25	25	25	25	25	22
Number of fire engines	34	34	32	33	33	34	34	34	31
Wholetime Staff Numbers	An increase of 3 FTE wholetime firefighters ↑		No change	No change	No change	An increase of 12 FTE wholetime firefighters ↑	An increase of 24 FTE wholetime firefighters ↑	An increase of 9 FTE wholetime firefighters ↑	No change
On-Call Staff Numbers	No change	No change	No change	2.8 FTE fewer on-call firefighters (7 total headcount)	No change	No change	No change	No change	17.4 FTE fewer on-call firefighters (26 total headcount)
Response time change (Overall)	1 minute and 11 seconds improvement ↑		11 seconds improvement ↑	No impact	No impact		No impact	No impact	4 seconds longer response time ↓
Response time change (Day)	1 minute and 46 seconds improvement ↑		5 seconds improvement ↑	No impact	No impact		No impact	No impact	1 second longer response time ↓
Response time change (Night)	1 second improvement ↑		20 second improvement ↑	No impact	No impact		No impact	No impact	3 seconds longer response time ↓
Change in Prevention, Protection and Response Activity	Industry and business engagement in rural areas will increase. More ‘Safe and Well’ and risk information visits conducted in rural areas.		No change	No change	No change	No change	No change	No change	Tolerable

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SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL POSITION	Cabinet Report April 26				Cabinet Report Oct 25				Change			
Option	**Capital One off costs/ (savings) £**	**Revenue One off costs/ (savings) £**	**Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Min ***	**Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Max ***	**Capital One off costs/ (savings) £**	**Revenue One off costs/ (savings) £**	**Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Min ***	**Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Max ***	**Capital One off costs/ (savings) £**	**Revenue One off costs/ (savings) £**	**Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Min ***	**Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Max ***
Previously approved property strategy for the redevelopment of Rewley Road Fire Station (Including Option 3)												
Current Rewley Road build	£14,068,000				£14,068,000				£0			
Rewley Road potential change risk	£305,000				£305,000				£0			
Sale of Rewley surplus land	(£22,400,000)				(£22,400,000)				£0			
Committed Rewley sales receipt (Including Fire Station improvement £3.1m)	£7,332,000				£7,332,000				£0			
Strategy Total	**(£695,000)**				**(£695,000)**				**£0**			
Option 1 - Implementation of a 12-Hour day shift												
Establishment costs			£146,100	£267,100			£146,100	£267,100			£0	£0
Reduced overtime costs			(£305,400)	(£305,400)			(£305,400)	(£305,400)			£0	£0
Reduced fleet costs		(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)		(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)		£0	£0	£0
Day shift fire station improvements	£2,000,000				£2,000,000				£0		£0	£0
***Option 1 Total* Part A**	**£1,305,000**	(£10,000)	(£190,900)	(£69,900)	**£1,305,000**	(£10,000)	(£190,900)	(£69,900)	**£0**	£0	£0	£0
Options 1 Part B: Wallingford Fire Station move	£7,000,000	(£250,000)			£7,000,000				£0			
Option 1 Total	**£8,305,000**	**(£260,000)**	**(£190,900)**	**(£69,900)**	**£8,305,000**	**(£260,000)**	**(£190,900)**	**(£69,900)**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Option 2 - Building a new fire station towards north of Oxford combining Rewley Road & Kidlington Fire station/ Head Quarters												
New Rewley Road sale price	(£25,000,000)				(£25,000,000)				£0			
Kidlington HQ (Excluding Workshop)	(£2,000,000)	£30,000			(£2,000,000)	£30,000			£0	£0		
Kidlington Crew Housing	(£4,600,000)	£69,000			(£4,600,000)	£69,000			£0	£0		
Rewley Road potential change risk	£305,000				£305,000				£0			
New north Oxford station build	£25,000,000				£25,000,000				£0			
Revised specialist rescue model +saving for crew housing		£203,300	(£128,000)	(£128,000)		£203,300	(£128,000)	(£128,000)		£0	£0	£0
Temporary Rewley Road alternative location		TBC										
Option 2 Total – Standalone excluding Option 1a/b	**(£6,295,000)**	**£302,300**	**(£128,000)**	**(£128,000)**	**(£6,295,000)**	**£302,300**	**(£128,000)**	**(£128,000)**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Plus Total Option 1 Part A	**(£4,295,000)**	**£292,300**	**(£318,900)**	**(£197,900)**	**(£4,295,000)**	**£292,300**	**(£318,900)**	**(£197,900)**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Plus Total Option 1 Part A + Part B	**£2,705,000**	**£42,300**	**(£318,900)**	**(£197,900)**	**£2,705,000**	**£42,300**	**(£318,900)**	**(£197,900)**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**

SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL POSITION	Cabinet Report April 26				Cabinet Report Oct 25				Change			
Option	Capital One off costs/ (savings) £	Revenue One off costs/ (savings) £	Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Min *	Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Max *	Capital One off costs/ (savings) £	Revenue One off costs/ (savings) £	Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Min *	Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Max *	Capital One off costs/ (savings) £	Revenue One off costs/ (savings) £	Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Min *	Revenue PA Costs/ (Savings) £ Max *
Option 3 - Removal of Rewley Road On -Call fire engine												
Reduced fleet costs		(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)		(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)		£0	£0	£0
Reduced pay and associated employee costs			(£56,000)	(£56,000)			(£56,000)	(£56,000)			£0	£0
Redundancy costs		£13,400				£13,400				£0		
Option 3 Total	**£0**	**£3,400**	**(£87,600)**	**(£87,600)**	**£0**	**£3,400**	**(£87,600)**	**(£87,600)**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Option 4 - The removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station												
Reduced fleet costs						(£10,000)	(£31,600)	(£31,600)		£10,000	£31,600	£31,600
Option 4 Total	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**(£10,000)**	**(£31,600)**	**(£31,600)**	**£0**	**£10,000**	**£31,600**	**£31,600**
Option 5 - Additional investment in the number of firefighters to maintain an additional fire engine 24/7 for Oxford (Not Budgeted)												
Establishment costs			£670,500	£1,280,000			£670,500	£1,280,000		£0	£0	£0
	£0	**£0**	**£670,500**	**£1,280,000**	**£0**	**£0**	**£670,500**	**£1,280,000**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Option 6 - Additional investment in the number of firefighters to maintain watch employee establishments at current levels (Not Budgeted)												
Establishment costs			£1,260,000	£1,260,000			£1,260,000	£1,260,000			£0	£0
	£0	**£0**	**£1,260,000**	**£1,260,000**	**£0**	**£0**	**£1,260,000**	**£1,260,000**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
Option 7 - Additional investment in the establishment to retain nine station support officers (SSOs) (Not Budgeted)												
Establishment costs			£621,000	£621,000			£621,000	£621,000			£0	£0
	£0	**£0**	**£621,000**	**£621,000**	**£0**	**£0**	**£621,000**	**£621,000**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**
NOW REMOVED FROM RECOMMENDATIONS												
Option 8- The potential closure of three on-call fire stations												
Eynsham Fire Station					(£150,000)	£35,050	(£241,700)	(£241,700)	£150,000	(£35,050)	£241,700	£241,700
Henley Fire Station					(£600,000)	£42,200	(£165,800)	(£165,800)	£600,000	(£42,200)	£165,800	£165,800
Woodstock Fire Station					(£450,000)	£70,250	(£171,500)	(£171,500)	£450,000	(£70,250)	£171,500	£171,500
	£0	**£0**	**£0**	**£0**	**(£1,200,000)**	**£147,500**	**(£579,000)**	**(£579,000)**	**£1,200,000**	**(£147,500)**	**£579,000**	**£579,000**
TOTAL CHANGE									**£1,200,000**	**(£137,500)**	**£610,600**	**£610,600**

Oxfordshire FRS

Improving our fire and rescue service.

Consultation Analysis Final Report

(Qualitative Findings)

2 April 2026

Executive Summary

This report presents analysis of 1,230 responses to the public consultation on proposals to improve Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. A mixed-methods approach combines quantitative analysis of closed questions with thematic analysis of open-text responses, enabling assessment of both overall patterns of opinion and the reasoning behind views on the proposals.

Overall Pattern of Responses

Across all proposals, responses were predominantly negative, with a high proportion of respondents expressing strong opposition.

For the Main Proposal, 65.6% of respondents expressed negative views (46.6% very negative), and 68.2% perceived a negative impact on Oxfordshire's communities (54.5% significant negative impact).

This pattern was consistent across Additional Proposals A–C, with Additional Proposal C (station closures) generating the strongest concern.

Key themes shaping responses

- **Service cover and response times:** Concerns that reduced local provision would increase reliance on more distant resources and result in slower or less reliable response times under real-world conditions.
- **Operational capacity and resilience:** Risks to backup capacity, flexibility and system resilience, particularly during concurrent incidents and peak demand.
- **Workforce sustainability:** Proposals seen as introducing new delivery risks linked to on-call availability, recruitment, retention and proposed crewing models.
- **Confidence in evidence and modelling:** Limited confidence in the evidence base, particularly use of averages and lack of clarity on how proposals would operate in practice.
- **Financial considerations:** Scepticism about whether efficiency savings justify potential impacts on service provision and long-term infrastructure.

Overall conclusion

There is a clear and consistent pattern of concern across the consultation, with responses predominantly negative across all proposals.

Support for the proposals is typically conditional, and depends on maintaining:

- effective local coverage
- reliable response times
- sufficient operational capacity and resilience

A central finding is that public confidence is closely linked to perceived impacts on safety and service reliability. Where these cannot be clearly demonstrated,

respondents indicate limited confidence in the proposals and call for greater clarity, evidence and reassurance to support decision-making.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This report presents analysis of responses to the public consultation on proposals to improve Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The consultation ran from 28 October 2025 to 31 January 2026. This included an extension from the original 12-week consultation period, which was scheduled to run until 20 January 2026.

The consultation invited feedback on proposed changes to the service's emergency response model.

A total of 1,230 submissions were received in response to the consultation. Responses included structured (closed) questions using Likert scales and open-text questions inviting qualitative comment.

1.2 Background

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for the Fire and Rescue Service in the county, and based on a review of delivery of emergency response and community safety services launched the Consultation on proposals to improve Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. The overall rationale for the consultation was:

- A significant shortage of on-call firefighter staffing hours. While on-call staff, who respond from home or work, remain vital, fewer people are able to commit due to changes in modern lifestyles.
- Recruitment is ongoing, but on-call firefighter numbers dropped 3% from 2014 to 2024, with total hours worked falling even more sharply.
- Over the past decade in Oxfordshire, full-time equivalent on-call firefighter numbers dropped by 36%, with staffing hours now as low as 20% of daytime needs.
- This means only about 5 out of 27 on-call fire engines may be available during peak times, resulting in slower response to high-risk incidents.
- Rapid urban growth further strains the current model and increases risks in areas distant from fire stations.

The proposals were split into three themes:

- **Effectiveness**: Changes that are designed to make us more effective.
- **Efficiency:** Changes that are designed to use our financial resources and our people differently to deliver improved services overall.
- I**nvestment**: Changes that are enabled by increasing the funding that the service receives.

The proposals consulted on were:

- **Main proposal – Creating five, day shift fire stations (theme: effectiveness)**
  Change how firefighters are deployed in the daytime by staffing five local stations during the day and relying more on on-call crews at night, aiming to improve daytime cover across

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the county but with some reduction in overnight cover in Oxford. With the linked decision Wallingford station: either upgrade the current station or move it to a new site at Crowmarsh.

Additional proposals to deliver additional benefits on top of the main proposal.

A. **New station north of Oxford (theme: effectiveness):** Merge several Oxford-area facilities into one new modern station north of the city, replacing existing sites.
B. **Thame (theme: efficiency):** Remove one of Thame's two fire engines, keeping a single engine there.
C. **On-call station closures (theme: efficiency):** Close up to three on-call stations (Eynsham, Henley, Woodstock).
D. **Extra fire engine in Oxford (theme: investment):** Pay to keep an additional fire engine in Oxford available all the time, offsetting reductions in the main proposal.
E. **Keep firefighter numbers (theme: investment):** Pay to keep current firefighter numbers at each station, rather than reducing them.
F. **Keep station support officers (theme: investment):** Pay to keep station support staff who help manage and recruit on-call firefighters.

The analysis provided in this interim report covers feedback on the main proposal and Additional Proposals A to F.

1.3 Approach to analysis

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining:

- Quantitative analysis to understand the distribution of opinion
- Qualitative analysis to understand the reasoning behind responses

This approach ensures the findings reflect both what respondents think and why they think it.

1.3.1 Quantitative analysis

Responses to closed questions were analysed using descriptive statistics.

This provides an overview of the distribution of opinion across respondents, including:

- Levels of agreement and disagreement, and
- Levels of uncertainty (e.g. "not sure / don't know").

Percentages are based on valid responses and exclude respondents who did not provide an answer.

1.3.2 Qualitative analysis

All open-text responses were analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

- Responses were coded and grouped into key themes reflecting the main arguments, concerns, and suggestions raised by respondents.
- Each response was reviewed in full to ensure that both primary and secondary points were captured.

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- Themes were developed iteratively and refined to ensure they accurately reflect the dataset.

Findings are presented thematically, supported by illustrative quotes from respondents.

1.3.3 Organisational responses

A small number of responses were submitted on behalf of organisations. These were analysed using the key themes.

Methodology for reviewing organisational submissions:

- All responses from unions, councils, organisations, residents and businesses provided to us were collated for review.
- Each response was examined individually and coded to identify recurring themes.
- A thematic analysis approach was used to categorise issues such as stations, workforce, modelling, and risk.
- Sentiment analysis was performed to gauge overall support or opposition.
- Key evidence and illustrative quotations were extracted to support the findings.
- Findings were cross-checked to ensure consistency across all submissions.
- A comparative analysis was conducted to identify differences in perspective between stakeholder groups and to ensure every viewpoint was included for consideration by decision makers.
- A structured narrative was developed that highlights areas of agreement, identifies potential risks, and clarifies points of divergence.

1.3.4 Interpreting the findings

The analysis is descriptive and evidence-based, aiming to reflect the range and nature of views expressed.

- Findings highlight the key themes and arguments raised by respondents.
- The analysis does not seek to weight responses or present statistically representative results.

1.4 Report Structure

Following this brief introduction, the remainder of this high-level report is set out as follows.

Section two:	Quantitative overview of responses
Section three:	Qualitative findings – Main Proposal
Section four:	Qualitative findings – Additional Proposal A
Section five:	Qualitative findings – Additional Proposal B
Section six:	Qualitative findings – Additional Proposal C
Section seven:	Stakeholder submissions to the consultation
Appendix A:	Respondent profile

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Appendix B: Impact Assessment FBU campaign

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2 QUANTITATIVE OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES

This section provides an overview of responses to the consultation's closed questions, including views and perceived impacts of the Main Proposal and Additional Proposals A–C, agreement with the reasons for change and the importance of potential investment options (proposals D –F).

2.1 Views and perceived impacts by proposal

This section presents responses to closed questions on views and perceived impacts for the Main Proposal and Additional Proposals A–C.

For each proposal, respondents were asked:

- "What are your views on this proposal?"
- "What impact, if any, will this proposal have on Oxfordshire's communities?"

2.1.1 Main Proposal

2.1.1.1 Views on the Main Proposal

A total of 1,175 valid responses were received (95.5% of all respondents), with a further 36 (2.9%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 19 (1.5%) not providing a response.

Views were predominantly negative, with **65.6%** of valid respondents reporting a negative view, including **46.6% r**eporting a very negative view.

23.8% of valid respondents reported positive views, while 10.7% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Very negative	547	46.6%
Fairly negative	223	19.0%
Neutral	126	10.7%
Fairly positive	157	13.4%
Very positive	122	10.4%
Total (valid)	**1,175**	**100.0%**

2.1.1.2 Perceived impact of the Main Proposal

A total of 1,151 valid responses were received (93.6% of all respondents), with a further 54 (4.4%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 25 (2.0%) not providing a response.

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Perceived impacts were predominantly negative, with **68.2%** of valid respondents reporting a negative impact, including **54.5%** reporting a significant negative impact.

21.2% of valid respondents reported a positive impact, while 10.7% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Significant positive impact	102	8.9%
Somewhat positive impact	141	12.3%
Neutral	123	10.7%
Somewhat negative impact	158	13.7%
Significant negative impact	627	54.5%
Total (valid)	**1,151**	**100.0%**

2.1.2 Additional Proposal A

2.1.2.1 Views on Additional Proposal A

A total of 1,127 valid responses were received (91.7% of all respondents), with a further 78 (6.3%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 25 (2.0%) not providing a response.

Views were predominantly negative, with **57.2%** of valid respondents reporting a negative view, including **38.3%** reporting a very negative view.

22.1% of valid respondents reported positive views, while 20.6% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Very negative	432	38.3%
Fairly negative	213	18.9%
Neutral	232	20.6%
Fairly positive	138	12.2%
Very positive	112	9.9%
Total (valid)	**1,127**	**100.0%**

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2.1.2.2 Perceived impact of Additional Proposal A

A total of 1,072 valid responses were received (87.2% of all respondents), with a further 107 (8.7%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 50 (4.1%) not providing a response.

Perceived impacts were predominantly negative, with **59.0%** of valid respondents reporting a negative impact, including **44.6%** reporting a significant negative impact.

22.3% of valid respondents reported a positive impact, while 18.8% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Significant positive impact	91	8.5%
Somewhat positive impact	148	13.8%
Neutral	201	18.8%
Somewhat negative impact	154	14.4%
Significant negative impact	478	44.6%
Total (valid)	**1,072**	**100.0%**

2.1.3 Additional Proposal B

2.1.3.1 Views on Additional Proposal B

A total of 1,081 valid responses were received (88.0% of all respondents), with a further 117 (9.5%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 32 (2.6%) not providing a response.

Views were predominantly negative, with **56.8%** of valid respondents reporting a negative view, including **41.9%** reporting a very negative view.

16.8% of valid respondents reported positive views, while 26.4% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Very negative	453	41.9%
Fairly negative	161	14.9%
Neutral	285	26.4%
Fairly positive	117	10.8%
Very positive	65	6.0%
Total (valid)	**1,081**	**100.0%**

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2.1.3.2 Perceived impact of Additional Proposal B

A total of 1,020 valid responses were received (82.9% of all respondents), with a further 138 (11.2%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 72 (5.9%) not providing a response.

Perceived impacts were predominantly negative, with **60.7%** of valid respondents reporting a negative impact, including **44.2%** reporting a significant negative impact.

11.9% of valid respondents reported a positive impact, while 27.4% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Significant positive impact	39	3.8%
Somewhat positive impact	83	8.1%
Neutral	279	27.4%
Somewhat negative impact	168	16.5%
Significant negative impact	451	44.2%
Total (valid)	**1,020**	**100.0%**

2.1.4 Additional Proposal C

2.1.4.1 Views on Additional Proposal C

A total of 1,168 valid responses were received (95.0% of all respondents), with a further 42 (3.4%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 20 (1.6%) not providing a response.

Views were predominantly negative, with **78.4%** of valid respondents reporting a negative view, including **64.7%** reporting a very negative view.

9.8% of valid respondents reported positive views, while 11.8% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Very negative	756	64.7%
Fairly negative	160	13.7%
Neutral	138	11.8%
Fairly positive	71	6.1%
Very positive	43	3.7%
Total (valid)	**1,168**	**100.0%**

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2.1.4.2 Perceived impact of the Additional Proposal C

A total of 1,129 valid responses were received (91.8% of all respondents), with a further 52 (4.2%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 49 (4.0%) not providing a response.

Perceived impacts were predominantly negative, with **79.5%** of valid respondents reporting a negative impact, including **64.2%** reporting a significant negative impact.

10.0% of valid respondents reported a positive impact, while 10.5% were neutral.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Significant positive impact	55	4.9%
Somewhat positive impact	58	5.1%
Neutral	118	10.5%
Somewhat negative impact	173	15.3%
Significant negative impact	725	64.2%
Total (valid)	**1,129**	**100.0%**

2.2 Agreement with the Reasons for Change

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the reasons for changing how emergency responses are delivered, as set out in the consultation document.

A total of 1,205 valid responses were received (98.0% of all respondents), with a further 12 (1.0%) selecting 'not sure / don't know' and 13 (1.1%) not providing a response.

Responses were predominantly negative, with **69.3%** of valid respondents expressing disagreement with the reasons for change, including **53.9%** expressing strong disagreement.

23.7% of valid respondents expressed agreement, while 7.1% neither agreed nor disagreed.

The distribution of responses is shown below.

Response option	Count	% of valid responses
Strongly agree	102	8.5%
Agree	183	15.2%
Neither agree nor disagree	85	7.1%
Disagree	185	15.4%

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Strongly disagree	650	53.9%
Total (valid)	**1,205**	**100.0%**

2.3 Importance of Investment Proposals

Respondents were asked to rate how important it is that the council considers investing in each of the following proposals (Proposals D–F), on a scale from 1 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important):

- D: Invest to keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7
- E: Invest to keep current firefighter numbers at each station
- F: Invest to keep Station Support Officers

Responses were grouped into three bands: low (1–3), medium (4–7) and high (8–10). The distribution of responses is shown below.

Proposal	Low (1-3)	Medium (4-7)	High (8-10)	Total (valid)
D: Invest to keep an extra fire engine in Oxford 24/7	128 (11.1%)	256 (22.3%)	764 (**66.6%**)	1,148
E: Invest to keep current firefighter numbers at each station	53 (4.6%)	148 (12.8%)	956 (**82.6%**)	1,157
F: Invest to keep Station Support Officers	86 (7.5%)	273 (23.7%)	795 (**68.9%**)	1,154

Percentages are calculated based on valid responses for each proposal.

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3 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: MAIN PROPOSAL

This section presents the qualitative findings relating to the main proposal, exploring the reasoning, concerns and perceived impacts raised by respondents to the consultation.

3.1 Overview of responses

Analysis of responses to the main proposal indicates that views were predominantly negative, driven by concerns about how the proposal would operate in practice, particularly its impact on service coverage and workforce sustainability. These were consistently identified as key constraints on deliverability.

While some respondents supported the principle of aligning resources more closely with demand, this support was typically conditional on maintaining safe and reliable service provision. A recurring view was that patterns of risk should take precedence over demand when determining service provision.

Views were also shaped by differing interpretations of what constitutes an efficient and resilient fire and rescue service, alongside varying levels of confidence in the evidence and financial rationale underpinning the proposal.

3.2 Headline findings by theme

Six main themes were identified, which in summary were as follows:

Service cover and availability

This was the most prominent theme and a key driver of overall sentiment across responses. Views were primarily characterised by concerns that the proposal may redistribute rather than strengthen service capacity, improving daytime availability while creating gaps in night-time cover and local provision. This was frequently linked to reduced system resilience, greater reliance on distant resources and a perceived reduction in coverage.

Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Impacts of the Main Proposal on the workforce were widely seen as a key constraint on deliverability, with concerns that 12-hour shifts and increased reliance on overnight on-call availability would be difficult to sustain in practice. Responses linked the model to risks around recruitment, retention, fatigue and the reliability of service provision, with workforce factors seen as affecting overall system resilience. A recurring view was that the proposal may exacerbate existing workforce challenges rather than resolve them.

Response times

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Responses consistently raised concerns that the proposal may lead to longer and less reliable response times, particularly where local availability is reduced and reliance on more distant or on-call resources increases. These concerns were often grounded in real-world travel conditions and local geography, with delays seen as increasing risk to life and property in time-critical incidents.

Operational efficiency

Views on operational efficiency were mixed and reflected differing interpretations of what constitutes an effective service. While some supported better alignment of resources with demand, others argued that the proposal may reduce overall capacity and flexibility, particularly where underutilised resources are seen as providing essential backup and resilience. Overall, responses reflect a tension between maximising utilisation and maintaining system capacity.

Evidence base, modelling and consultation assumptions

Confidence in the evidence base was mixed. While some respondents viewed the proposal as data-driven, many questioned its real-world applicability, particularly the use of averages and reliance on historic data. Concerns focused on whether the modelling adequately reflects local conditions, incident severity and future risk, alongside calls for greater transparency and operational input.

Financial considerations

Financial arguments were widely contested. A dominant concern was that the proposal reflects cost reduction at the expense of service provision and public safety, with some questioning whether the scale of savings justifies the associated risks. A smaller number of responses supported the need to operate within financial constraints, viewing the proposal as a pragmatic reallocation of limited resources.

The sections below explore each theme in more detail, including the key issues raised and areas of agreement and divergence.

3.3 Service cover and availability

Responses addressed service coverage and availability under the proposed model, with sentiment predominantly negative. While some respondents expressed conditional support for increasing daytime cover, a dominant concern was that the proposal may redistribute existing pressures rather than strengthen overall system resilience, improving availability in some areas while creating new gaps elsewhere. This is reflected in concerns about reduced night-time cover, uneven local impacts and the redistribution of resources.

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Across responses, views are shaped by a trade-off between improving daytime availability and maintaining overall service capacity. While some view the proposal as a more efficient distribution of resources, many interpret it as reducing provision in certain locations or times of day.

3.3.1 Night-time cover

Respondents raised strong concerns about fire service cover and availability during night-time hours under the proposed model. These respondents perceived the proposal would reduce overnight capacity and cause potential delays in response times, and often cited increases in risk to life and reduced confidence in service reliability. Some respondents view improvements to daytime availability as coming at the expense of overnight provision, which is considered an unacceptable trade-off.

Responses highlight night-time as a period of heightened risk, particularly in residential settings where occupants may be asleep and more vulnerable. While incident volumes may be lower, respondents emphasise that incidents can be more severe, with concerns that reduced availability may increase the risk of escalation before crews arrive. Some respondents also suggest that this level of risk may not be fully reflected in the modelling underpinning the proposal.

A further concern is the proposed reliance on on-call provision overnight, alongside reduced wholetime availability. This is seen as introducing greater uncertainty in response capability, particularly where on-call availability may be variable, raising concerns about the service's ability to respond effectively, including during concurrent incidents.

> *"Improved cover in the day should never be at the expense of emergency cover at night. ... At nighttime, people are not awake and alert. This delays people's response... often increasing the severity of the impact."*

3.3.2 Impacts on local service coverage

Responses raised concerns about the impact of the proposal on local service coverage. The redistribution of resources, relocation of firefighters and removal or relocation of fire engines are frequently interpreted as creating gaps in provision, particularly in areas currently served by existing stations affected by the proposal.

A central concern is that some communities may be located further from fire service provision, with reliance on more distant stations seen as affecting response times, availability and reliability. This redistribution is also associated with increased pressure on remaining stations, with concerns that neighbouring resources may become stretched or less available.

These concerns are illustrated through references to specific localities and risk contexts, including smaller towns and heritage areas already close to response time thresholds, key corridors such as the Thames Valley and M40, and areas of population growth such as the Eynsham and Witney corridor. Respondents also highlight potential impacts on cross-county

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and motorway response, reduced availability of multiple appliances, and future housing and infrastructure pressures, with some suggesting that planned growth is likely to increase demand and place further strain on already stretched coverage over time.

> *"Great if you live in or near the five on-call stations. No benefit for those areas not, who then get a degraded service"*

3.3.3 Perception of diluting resources

A recurring view is that the proposal represents a net reduction or dilution of resources rather than a strengthening of provision. Respondents point to the removal of fire engines, stations, including the Rewley Road appliance, as evidence that resources are being redistributed rather than increased, resulting in coverage being spread more thinly. This is associated with reduced local capacity and increased pressure on remaining stations, particularly in areas such as Henley and parts of South and West Oxfordshire.

> *"Resources too thinly spread, increased risks to fire fighters' safety, residents and businesses in the county"*

3.3.4 Improvements to daytime availability and alignment with demand

A minority of responses within this theme expressed positive views, primarily because the proposal may improve daytime availability and better align resources with demand. This is seen as enabling a more efficient distribution of staffing and vehicles, with potential to improve response times and coverage. However, this support is typically conditional on ensuring that provision is not reduced elsewhere.

> "Better use of staffing and vehicles… available when most needed."

3.4 Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Responses within this theme focus on the proposed working patterns and crewing model in the main proposal and the implications for the current workforce, including sustainability, availability and service resilience. Sentiment was predominantly negative, with workforce considerations frequently framed as a key constraint affecting the deliverability of the proposal in practice.

While some respondents acknowledged that the on-call model was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, a central concern across responses was that the proposed 12-hour shift patterns and increased reliance on overnight on-call availability may place further strain on workforce stability and the reliability of the staffing model, rather than address underlying capacity challenges.

A minority of respondents expressed more positive views, typically linked to the potential for improved daytime coverage and more consistent staffing.

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Across responses, views are shaped by a tension between improving daytime staffing levels and maintaining a workforce model that is sustainable, reliable, and deliverable in practice.

3.4.1 Compatibility of the proposed working patterns

Concerns about the proposed 12-hour day shifts were a prominent feature across responses. Respondents raised issues relating to fatigue, work–life balance, and the ability to manage childcare and family responsibilities alongside longer shifts. These working patterns were widely described as difficult to sustain, with potential implications for workforce wellbeing, morale and long-term workforce stability.

12-hour shifts were also linked to operational risk. Fatigue was described as increasing the risk of errors or accidents, raising concerns about firefighter safety and the effectiveness of emergency response.

These concerns were often framed more broadly as a disruption to established working lives. Respondents highlighted the impact of longer days, commuting time, and reduced flexibility, as well as difficulties balancing the role with family responsibilities and secondary employment.

Some responses also referenced previous experience of similar shift patterns, suggesting these had not been maintained in practice or had negatively affected morale. In this context, alternative models, such as the 2-2-4 system, were proposed as more compatible with workforce needs.

Taken together, these responses indicate that concerns about working patterns are closely linked to the long-term sustainability and safety of the workforce model.

> *"More WT coverage should be an improvement however... the 12-hour shifts for example, I would have missed a huge amount of my children's lives... it is likely that my wife would have had to give up work... This could have pulled my family apart."*

3.4.2 Impacts on recruitment, retention and morale

Another concern across responses was that the proposed model may adversely affect recruitment and retention through changes to working patterns and availability requirements that reduce the attractiveness and viability of the role.

Respondents frequently suggested that 12-hour shifts could make firefighter roles less attractive and lead to the loss of experienced staff, particularly where they are difficult to reconcile with family life or other commitments. In this context, some indicated that the changes could prompt existing staff to leave while discouraging new recruits from joining.

Responses also highlighted the potential impact on on-call availability, particularly in relation to overnight cover. Some suggested that individuals currently providing daytime availability

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may be unwilling or unable to commit to night-time requirements, creating a risk of reduced availability and service cover.

A related concern was the practical and financial viability of remaining in the service. Some respondents indicated that restricting on-call participation primarily to night-time cover, or reducing daytime opportunities, could make the role less financially worthwhile or harder to combine with primary employment.

Across responses, these factors were also linked to morale, with some suggesting that the proposed changes may lead to feelings of being undervalued or adversely affected.

Taken together, these responses indicate that the proposal is perceived as having the potential to exacerbate existing recruitment and retention challenges, with direct implications for workforce stability.

> *"I am concerned that this will lead to many experienced and trained fire fighters leaving the service."*

3.4.3 Sustainability and resilience of the staffing model

Responses within this theme focus on whether the proposed staffing model would be reliable and sustainable in practice, particularly under conditions of variable availability and operational demand.

A central concern was that the model may not provide consistent cover across the full 24-hour period. This was frequently linked to the continued reliance on on-call firefighters overnight, combined with the potential reduction in daytime on-call availability. Respondents also highlighted the impact of sickness, competing commitments, or limited availability, suggesting that these factors could lead to gaps in coverage and reduced operational resilience.

Some responses questioned whether the model could weaken resilience by displacing existing daytime on-call contribution at stations where local crews are currently providing cover. In this view, guaranteed wholetime day cover may be achieved at the expense of reducing wider workforce participation and local resilience.

Concerns were also raised about operational capability. Some respondents suggested that changes to staffing patterns may reduce the availability of experienced wholetime firefighters, while others highlighted the risk of reduced exposure and potential skill fade within the on-call workforce.

Across responses, the proposal was described as redistributing existing workforce pressures rather than addressing underlying workforce constraints. While daytime coverage may improve, this was seen as potentially offset by increased fragility elsewhere in the system.

> *"You have stated that the appliances WILL be staffed overnight by the on-call crews but this is not a certainty. The only certainty is you will drop guaranteed fire appliance*

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availability through the night with the hope that the on call are either able or willing to crew."

3.4.4 Improvements to service reliability and alignment with demand

A minority of responses expressed support for the proposed model, particularly where it was seen as improving consistency and aligning staffing more closely with periods of higher demand.

Some respondents suggested that aspects of the on-call system are increasingly difficult to sustain, and that greater reliance on wholetime staffing could provide a more stable and predictable approach. Others highlighted potential benefits in terms of improved availability, consistency, and operational capability.

> "This proposal will increase the immediately available fire engines during the day… this provides certainty with availability in contrast with on-call fire engines where availability cannot always be guaranteed."

3.4.5 Need for greater clarity on proposed crewing arrangements and further engagement

A cross-cutting issue across responses was a perceived lack of clarity around how the proposed crewing arrangements would operate in practice. Respondents also called for further engagement with firefighters and representative bodies, emphasising the importance of drawing on frontline operational experience.

> *"There does not appear to have been consultation with staff already delivering the service… the proposals will mean significant changes to people's working lives…"*

Taken together, these responses indicate that workforce sustainability is viewed as a key determinant of the proposal's deliverability, particularly in terms of its ability to provide consistent and resilient service cover.

3.5 Response times

Responses within this theme focus on the impact of the proposal on response times. Sentiment was predominantly negative, with concerns driven primarily by the perception that response times would increase under the proposed model. These concerns were closely linked to perceived changes in service coverage, including increased travel distances, reduced local availability and greater reliance on more distant stations for some areas. A smaller number of respondents expressed more positive views, typically where the proposal was seen as improving daytime availability and increasing firefighter availability on station during periods of higher demand.

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3.5.1 Impact of reduced local provision on response times

Responses consistently suggest that the proposal is likely to lead to longer response times, particularly where local fire engines are removed or relocated. Increased reliance on more distant stations was seen as increasing travel time, with respondents emphasising that even small increases in attendance time could have significant consequences in time-critical incidents.

In many responses, these concerns were framed in terms of direct risks to life and property, with respondents emphasising that delays in response could result in incidents escalating before crews are able to intervene.

> *"Having local fire stations spread across the county ensures more households and commercial properties are close to emergency services should they need fast help. The proposed changes will slow the response times for locations that currently have fire stations."*

3.5.2 Night-time mobilisation delays and increased response risk

Concerns about response times were particularly pronounced in relation to night-time incidents. Respondents frequently highlighted that the proposed model increases reliance on on-call firefighters overnight, which was seen as introducing an additional mobilisation delay, as on-call crews must travel to the station before responding.

These concerns were compounded by the view that incidents occurring at night may be detected later, potentially allowing fires to develop further before emergency services are contacted. In this context, delays in response were seen as having more severe consequences, particularly for more remote communities.

> *"Most night time incidents are likely to have a great impact since people may not be aware of a fire until it has taken quite a hold. Therefore, the fire engines need to be at the fire very quickly. Night on-call crews increases the delay and, therefore, potentially the impact."*

3.5.3 Place-based concerns and real-world travel conditions

Concerns about response times were frequently grounded in specific local contexts. Many responses focused on edge-of-county areas, particularly Henley, where respondents questioned whether alternative stations could provide timely cover given the distances involved. In these areas, response times under the proposal were often described as reaching unacceptable levels.

Some responses highlighted potential impacts within Oxford, where the removal of the fire engine from Rewley road was seen as reducing immediate availability and increasing reliance on standby movements.

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Across both urban and rural contexts, respondents also raised concerns about real-world travel conditions, including traffic, roadworks, network layout, and future growth in population and vehicle use. These factors were frequently cited as reasons why modelled response times may not reflect operational reality, particularly under variable or peak conditions.

> *"Henley on Thames is situated in the far corner of the county. The nearest county fire station would be in Wallingford - a good 20 minutes away by the time the crew has assembled and prepared the tender - even with blue lights."*

3.5.4 Improvements in response times through increased on-station availability

A smaller number of respondents expressed confidence that the proposal could improve response times, particularly during the day. These responses often emphasised the benefit of having firefighters already on station, reducing mobilisation time and enabling a more immediate response in areas of higher demand.

However, these views were typically conditional on the proposal being delivered without reducing overall service coverage or creating new risks in other parts of the system.

> "I believe this would improve response times if firefighters are already on site..."

3.6 Operational efficiency

Responses within this theme focus on the proposal in terms of operational efficiency and the effective use of resources. Views were mixed, reflecting differing interpretations of what constitutes an efficient and resilient fire and rescue service.

3.6.1 Efficiency through alignment with demand

Some respondents supported the proposal on the basis that it represents a more efficient allocation of existing capacity, particularly where it would reduce reliance on uncrewed appliances and ensure that fire engines are available during periods of higher demand. In these responses, aligning staffing with incident patterns was seen as a more practical, predictable and sustainable use of limited resources. Some respondents also framed this support in terms of limitations within the current system, which was described as inefficient or increasingly difficult to sustain in practice.

> *"Staffing levels for on call are extremely low and it seems wasteful to have engines and buildings which cannot be used for most of the day and significant chunks of the evening."*

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3.6.2 Redistribution of resources rather than increased capacity

However, other responses questioned whether the proposal would deliver a genuine improvement in efficiency. A recurring theme was that any gains may reflect a redistribution of resources rather than an overall increase in capability, particularly where changes reduce available capacity or shift provision away from certain locations.

Some respondents suggested that while the proposal may address specific inefficiencies, particularly in daytime cover, it may introduce new challenges elsewhere in the system.

> *"I can see what they're trying to fix, but this feels like shuffling risk around, not actually reducing it. Yes, daytime cover is a problem. But fixing that by removing engines elsewhere and thinning night cover creates new gaps"*

3.6.3 Role of reserve capacity in supporting system resilience

A key point of divergence related to how unused or underutilised resources were interpreted. While some respondents viewed uncrewed appliances as inefficient, others emphasised their role as reserve capacity, particularly in maintaining flexibility and supporting wider system functioning.

Overall, views on efficiency differed depending on whether it was understood in terms of maximising utilisation or maintaining sufficient capacity across the system.

> *"An uncrewed fire engine during the day is no fire engine."*

3.7 Evidence base, modelling and consultation assumptions

Responses within this theme focus on how respondents interpreted and trusted the evidence underpinning the proposal, including the modelling, assumptions and wider consultation framing. Views were mixed, reflecting differing levels of confidence in the evidence presented. While some respondents accepted the evidence presented and viewed the proposal as data-driven, others expressed scepticism about the assumptions, completeness, and real-world applicability of the analysis. This divergence in confidence strongly influenced the extent to which respondents felt able to support the proposal.

3.7.1 Concerns about assumptions, completeness and real-world applicability

Respondents questioned the assumptions, completeness and real-world applicability of the evidence base. Concerns frequently focused on the use of averages, particularly in relation to response times, with respondents arguing that county-wide figures did not reflect local geography, committed-pump scenarios, or how incidents unfold in practice. Others questioned whether the analysis adequately accounted for factors such as night-time on-call

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reliability, cross-border activity, incident concurrency and the wider implications of reallocating resources across the system.

Some responses also suggested that the consultation material was framed too selectively, with concerns that evidence had been presented in a way that supported a predetermined conclusion or did not fully set out alternative interpretations, trade-offs, or contentious aspects of the proposals.

> "While I recognise the need to improve daytime cover, the modelling relies too heavily on countywide averages and does not address specific locality risks, especially at night when the risk of fatalities and severe incidents is higher."

3.7.2 Frequency, severity and future risk in modelling assumptions

A recurring theme across responses was that the evidence appeared to focus more heavily on the number of incidents than on their scale, severity or consequences. Respondents questioned whether lower-frequency but higher-severity incidents, particularly at night, had been given sufficient weight in the analysis. This included concerns that fires, RTCs and other serious incidents may be less common outside the daytime period but potentially more dangerous and resource intensive.

A related concern was that the modelling was seen as overly dependent on historic data and did not sufficiently account for future changes in risk and demand. Respondents referred to housing growth, population change, business development, congestion, major events, and emerging environmental risks as factors that may alter future demand and challenge conclusions based primarily on past incident patterns.

> "Your data relates to numbers of incidents. Have you considered and demonstrated the scale and impact of the incidents?"

3.7.3 Need for greater transparency and more localised evidence

Across responses, there were consistent calls for greater transparency and more detailed supporting evidence. Respondents requested more localised analysis, including clearer breakdowns of response times, incident patterns and workforce availability, as well as greater clarity on the assumptions underpinning the modelling. Some also called for additional scenario testing, particularly in relation to night-time cover, simultaneous incidents, Oxford impacts, edge-of-county communities and cross-border support.

In several responses, the credibility of the evidence was linked to the extent to which it was informed by operational knowledge, with respondents arguing that firefighter, representative, and local stakeholder input was necessary to test the realism of the modelling.

> "Without postcode-level modelling or call-handling data, the overall effect on resilience is uncertain."

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3.7.4 Mixed confidence in the evidence base

Some respondents expressed confidence in the evidence presented, viewing the proposal as grounded in incident data and aligned with current patterns of demand and availability. In these responses, the proposal was often seen as a rational response to a genuine problem, particularly where the current model was described as increasingly difficult to sustain. In some cases, however, this support remained cautious or conditional, with respondents accepting the underlying diagnosis of low daytime availability while questioning whether the specific design of the proposal had not yet been sufficiently evidenced.

> *"I am fairly positive about this proposal because it directly addresses what appears to be the most significant weakness in the current model... That said, my support is cautious... it will be important that the assumptions underpinning the modelling are kept under review once implemented."*

3.8 Financial considerations

Responses within this theme focus on how the financial rationale underpinning the proposal was interpreted.

3.8.1 Prioritisation of cost over safety

A concern across responses was that financial considerations were being prioritised over service quality and public safety. The proposal was frequently characterised as a form of cost-cutting, with respondents questioning whether reducing resources, including stations and staffing, could be justified where it could increase risk to communities. These concerns were often framed in strong terms, emphasising that financial savings should not come at the expense of life safety.

> "Our safety must never come at the cost of budget cuts."

3.8.2 Value for money and scale of savings

Some respondents questioned whether the financial case for the proposal was sufficiently compelling. The scale of potential savings was described as limited relative to the risks and impacts, with suggestions that the changes may not represent good value for money.

> "The savings seem minimal relative to the costs and disruption"

3.8.3 Financial realism and operating constraints

Some respondents supported the proposal as a pragmatic response to financial constraints, viewing it as a reasonable way of improving service provision within the existing cost envelope.

> "This seems a good way to increase daytime fire cover within the current cost envelope of the service."

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3.9 Impacts on Oxfordshire's communities

3.9.1 Increased risk to life and property from greater distance to emergency resources

Responses suggest that the proposal could lead to slower emergency response for some communities, particularly where reliance on more distant resources is required. This is seen as increasing the risk of incidents escalating before crews arrive, with potential consequences for life, injury and property damage.

3.9.2 Increased vulnerability at night due to reduced response certainty

A recurring concern was that communities may be more vulnerable at night, when incidents may be more severe and response capacity less certain under the proposal, particularly where reliance on on-call availability may introduce additional delays to response.

3.9.3 Uneven distribution of service impacts across Oxfordshire

Responses suggest that impacts would not be evenly distributed, with some communities experiencing improved service while others, particularly in more rural or edge-of-county areas, may face reduced coverage. This was described as creating unequal levels of protection across the county.

3.9.4 Reduced sense of local safety and reassurance

The loss or reduction of local fire service presence is seen by some as diminishing community reassurance and visibility. Some respondents suggest this could increase anxiety, particularly among more vulnerable groups.

3.9.5 Impacts of workforce instability and service reliability

Concerns about staffing changes are linked to potential impacts on service reliability, with respondents suggesting that workforce instability, particularly in relation to availability and retention, could reduce the consistency and effectiveness of emergency response for communities.

3.10 Suggestions to lessen impacts on Oxfordshire's communities

3.10.1 Maintain local provision and avoid reductions in coverage

Responses emphasised maintaining existing fire stations, appliances and local presence, particularly in areas most affected. This includes retaining specific stations or resources to support local response capability.

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3.10.2 Increase staffing capacity to maintain or enhance coverage

Some responses propose increasing staffing levels as a way to mitigate impacts, particularly through recruiting additional wholetime firefighters or supporting more consistent 24/7 cover. These suggestions are framed as a way of supporting response capability across the system.

3.10.3 Strengthen recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters

A common suggestion is to address workforce challenges by improving recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters. Suggestions include enhanced incentives, pay, employer engagement, and more flexible working arrangements, with the aim of improving availability.

3.10.4 Increase funding and investment in the fire service

Some respondents suggest that impacts could be mitigated through increased financial investment, either from local or central government. This includes funding to support staffing, maintain infrastructure, and support overall service capacity.

3.10.5 Adopt phased, flexible or alternative implementation approaches

Some responses propose modifying how changes are implemented, including phasing proposals over time, piloting new models, or exploring alternative crewing and deployment approaches. These are framed as ways to test assumptions and reduce potential unintended impacts.

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4 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL A

This section presents the qualitative findings relating to Additional Proposal A, exploring the reasoning, concerns and perceived impacts raised by respondents.

4.1 Overview of responses

Responses to Additional Proposal A were primarily driven by concerns about how the proposed consolidation of Kidlington and Rewley Road would affect local coverage, operational capacity and workforce sustainability.

A central tension across responses was between the potential strategic benefits of a more centralised, modern facility and the perceived risks of reducing distributed coverage and locally based resources.

While a minority of respondents supported the proposal in principle, this support was typically conditional on maintaining overall service capacity, specialist capability and effective response across the county.

Across responses, there was a consistent pattern of conditional support, with respondents indicating that changes would be acceptable only where they did not lead to increased response times, reduced local coverage or loss of specialist capability.

Some respondents also indicated that they were unable to fully assess the proposal due to limited detail provided, particularly in relation to the proposed location, operational arrangements and the assumptions underpinning modelling.

4.2 Headline findings by theme

Six main themes were identified, which in summary were as follows:

Impacts of consolidation on coverage and geographical risk

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This was a central theme across responses and focused on the implications of combining Kidlington and Rewley Road fire stations into a single fire station to the north of Oxford. Responses were primarily characterised by concerns that consolidation and relocation may reduce distributed coverage, weaken local resilience and increase geographic risk, particularly in Oxford, surrounding towns and villages and parts of South Oxfordshire. While some respondents supported the strategic logic of a north Oxford location, this was typically conditional on maintaining overall service provision and avoiding gaps in coverage.

Response times

Responses to this theme were primarily driven by concerns that relocating resources away from existing stations may increase response times, particularly in Oxford city centre and communities surrounding Oxford. These concerns were closely linked to congestion, travel distances and the importance of proximity to high-risk areas, with many respondents emphasising that even small delays may have significant operational consequences.

Perceived reduction in capacity and risks to operational resilience

A prominent theme across responses was whether the proposal would strengthen or reduce overall operational capacity. Responses were often characterised by the view that consolidation may reduce available resources and weaken resilience, particularly if it results in fewer appliances or the loss of specialist capability. Concerns were especially pronounced in relation to the future of the Rescue Tender based in Kidlington and whether its expertise could be effectively replicated if dispersed.

Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Responses in this theme focused on the practical and organisational effects of the proposal on firefighters, particularly those based at Kidlington. Concerns centred on loss of accommodation, the accessibility of a new location, and the potential implications for morale, retention and on-call availability. While a smaller number of respondents noted possible benefits from improved facilities and access, views were predominantly shaped by concern about workforce disruption and reduced stability.

Evidence base, modelling and consultation assumptions

A recurring issue across responses was whether the evidence base was sufficiently detailed and robust to support the proposal. Responses frequently highlighted limited clarity on the proposed location, operational arrangements, and specialist provision, alongside concerns that the modelling may not fully reflect real-world conditions such as traffic, geography and future demand. Some respondents indicated that this lack of detail made the proposal difficult to assess with confidence.

Financial considerations

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Responses in this theme focused on whether the financial case for the proposal was justified and whether investment would be better directed towards existing services. A prominent concern was that the proposal may involve high upfront costs without clear operational benefit, with some respondents viewing it as financially driven or linked to asset sales. A smaller number supported the proposal on efficiency grounds, though this was generally conditional on clear evidence of service improvement and long-term value.

The following sections explore each theme, including the key issues raised, areas of agreement and divergence and perceived impacts.

4.3 Impacts of consolidation on coverage and geographical risk

Responses in this theme focused on the proposed consolidation of Kidlington and Rewley Road stations and the implications of moving from a distributed to a more centralised configuration of service provision.

Existing stations were discussed in terms of the roles they play within both local areas and the wider operational network and how these functions may be affected by the proposed model.

4.3.1 Loss of coverage and increased geographic risk

A central concern was that consolidating Kidlington and Rewley Road would reduce local coverage by replacing two established stations with a single site. Respondents frequently challenged the framing of the proposal as a combination of resources, instead viewing it as a net reduction in provision, with fewer locally based appliances available to respond to incidents.

Many respondents linked these concerns to increased travel distances and gaps in coverage between key areas. Kidlington was described as providing strategic “in-between” coverage between Oxford and surrounding towns and villages and its removal was seen as creating gaps between locations such as Oxford and Witney or Banbury.

Overall, respondents suggested that longer travel distances, combined with population growth and development, may reduce the effectiveness of response. A recurring view was that service provision should expand alongside demand, with some respondents supporting new infrastructure only where it supplements rather than replaces existing capacity.

> *“Removing two stations into one is removing available stations.”*

4.3.2 City centre risk and access constraints

Some responses raised concerns about maintaining effective service coverage within central Oxford, particularly given its high-risk characteristics and perceived access constraints.

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Respondents highlighted the city's historic built environment, high population density and concentration of activity as factors increasing both the likelihood and potential severity of incidents.

Some responses also emphasised the role of the Rewley Road site in providing immediate, locally based response to the city centre. Its location was described as critical for enabling rapid response within an area that is difficult to reach from outside. In this context, relocating provision away from a central location was seen as increasing reliance on appliances travelling into Oxford from surrounding areas.

This was linked to concerns about congestion and limited access routes, including pressures on roads such as the A40. A recurring view was that these constraints may delay response in time-critical incidents where appliances must enter the city from outside.

> *"Oxford is a very historic city with many students and old buildings with fire and traffic hazards. Traffic can be gridlocked – this risks lives not having a city centre-based engine."*

4.3.3 Impact of centralisation on network coverage and local resilience

Responses raised concerns that consolidating stations may reduce the flexibility and resilience of the wider network. The current distributed configuration was seen as enabling localised capacity and backup, with stations performing complementary roles across different areas of the county.

A concern was that a single-site configuration may limit the ability to respond to concurrent or geographically dispersed incidents, particularly where resources are already committed elsewhere. This was seen as reducing availability and flexibility across the system.

Some responses also questioned whether the proposed configuration would fully replace existing operational capability, particularly where changes to appliances, crewing or specialist provision may result in fewer resources being available.

Concerns were also raised about night-time resilience, particularly where relocation may reduce the availability of on-call staff or make attendance more difficult.

> *"If Kidlington closes and the North Station pump is dealing with an incident, Oxford cover is very much depleted."*

4.3.4 Perceived north-south imbalance in service provision

Some responses highlighted that the proposal may reduce effective coverage for parts of the county, particularly in South Oxfordshire, rural areas and outlying towns. Respondents questioned whether a north Oxford location would provide adequate and timely response for these communities.

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Locations such as Henley, Shiplake, Thame and Banbury were referenced, with concerns that resources may be redistributed towards the north, leaving other areas less well served.

> *"Another example of Oxfordshire council funding being spent in the north of the county at the expense of residents in the south."*

4.3.5 Strategic location and improved access across the county

A minority of responses supported the proposed north Oxford location, particularly where it was seen as offering a more strategic position within the road network. Improved access to routes such as the A34, A40 and ring road was seen as enabling faster movement across the county and more efficient coordination of resources.

Some respondents also noted that the current Rewley Road site is increasingly constrained, and that relocation could improve operational efficiency and working conditions through a purpose-built facility.

Supportive responses also reflected a view that risk and demand are increasingly located outside the city centre, particularly along major road networks and areas of housing growth.

However, this support was typically conditional on maintaining sufficient operational capacity and not reducing overall service provision.

> *"This allows us to adapt to the reality of where we attend the majority of incidents, make better use of our resources with a better road network and create a fit for purpose response model."*

4.4 Response times

Responses in this theme focused on how changes to station configuration may affect response times across Oxford and the wider county. In particular, respondents considered how relocating resources and increasing distances between stations and communities may influence the speed and reliability of emergency response.

4.4.1 Response times in Oxford

Responses raised concerns that relocating resources away from Rewley Road may increase response times within Oxford, particularly in the city centre. While some respondents suggested that a north Oxford location could improve average response times at a county-wide level, many emphasised the importance of proximity to areas of concentrated risk within the city.

In this context, Rewley Road was seen as providing immediate access to high-risk areas, including locations with high population density, historic buildings, and student accommodation. Its relocation was therefore understood as increasing the distance appliances must travel to reach incidents within the city.

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These concerns were closely linked to access constraints, with respondents highlighting congestion, complex road layouts, and planned transport changes as factors that may delay appliances travelling into Oxford. A recurring view was that even small increases in response times could be operationally significant, particularly in time-critical incidents.

> *"You will reduce coverage and increase response times to central Oxford, with its high population density and significant numbers of historic buildings."*

4.4.2 Response times in areas surrounding Oxford

Responses also raised concerns about the potential impact on response times for areas surrounding Oxford. A central issue was that consolidating stations may increase distances between appliances and the communities they serve, particularly where locally based stations are removed.

Concerns were often framed in relation to specific locations, including Kidlington and Henley, where respondents anticipated reduced local coverage and longer travel distances. In this context, locally based stations were seen as enabling shorter and more reliable response times.

A recurring view was that increasing the distance between stations and communities may reduce the timeliness and reliability of response, particularly where resources are required to travel further or where availability is already constrained.

> *"Amalgamating resources moves them further from their current localities, which would negatively impact response times."*

4.5 Perceived reduction in capacity and risks to operational resilience

Responses in this theme focused on how the proposal may affect the overall level of operational capacity available, the retention of specialist capability and the extent to which any new configuration would strengthen or weaken service resilience.

While some respondents recognised potential benefits in modernising infrastructure and improving the efficiency of the estate, this support was typically conditional on maintaining or enhancing overall capacity and specialist capability, rather than reducing them.

4.5.1 Perceived reduction in operational capacity and resource availability

A recurring concern was that the proposal may result in a net reduction in operational capacity, particularly in relation to the number of appliances and overall resource availability. Respondents frequently challenged the framing of the proposal as a combination of stations, suggesting instead that it represents a reduction in resources, including the removal of fire

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engines and changes to crewing arrangements, potentially limiting the availability of resources to respond to incidents.

> *"...combining the stations would mean bringing all the resources into one location, however this is a removal of resources ... and not a combination."*

4.5.2 Loss of specialist capability and expertise

Responses raised strong concerns about the removal of specialist resources, particularly the Rescue Tender and associated crews at Kidlington. A central issue was the potential loss of an integrated, multi-skilled capability, combining specialist equipment with experienced personnel trained to operate across a range of complex incidents. This capability was often described as playing a critical role in certain incident types and not easily replaced once lost.

Some respondents questioned whether the Rescue Tender's capability could be replicated through the redistribution of equipment or skills across other appliances. A recurring view was that dispersal would dilute expertise and reduce the effectiveness of response, particularly where coordinated, team-based specialist intervention is required.

> *"I would refer to my earlier response which focused on the benefits of the Specialist Rescue Team/Tender with a concern that this resource could be lost if these specific changes occurred. There is a depth of experience and capability in this resource and, as highlighted, the loss of it would have a significant impact on those who need their broad range of interventions."*

4.5.3 Modernisation of infrastructure and more efficient use of resources

Some responses supported the proposal where it was seen as an opportunity to modernise infrastructure and improve the efficiency of the estate. Existing sites were described as outdated, constrained, or no longer fit for purpose, with references to ageing buildings, limitations of the Rewley Road site, and underused space within current headquarters. In this context, a new, purpose-built facility was seen as better aligned with current operational requirements, enabling improved facilities, enhanced training provision, and infrastructure better suited to contemporary firefighting practices and emerging risks.

Some respondents also supported the consolidation of functions into a single site, with co-location of headquarters, operational crews and specialist resources seen as enabling improved coordination and more efficient use of investment. However, this support was typically conditional on consolidation delivering genuine operational improvements and not resulting in a reduction in overall resources or service capacity, particularly in relation to specialist provision.

> *"It's about time we invest in our stations, making them future proof... Current stations do not meet the needs for a fire service in this day."*

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4.6 Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Responses identified a range of concerns relating to the workforce impacts of the proposed consolidation of Kidlington and Rewley Road into a new station. These centred on the practical implications for firefighters, particularly those based at Kidlington, including the loss of accommodation and the accessibility of a new site, alongside broader impacts on workforce stability, morale and retention.

4.6.1 Workforce displacement and loss of accommodation

A prominent concern across responses was the impact of the proposal on firefighters based at Kidlington, particularly the loss of tied accommodation and relocation. Responses frequently described the proposal as displacing staff from their homes, with some highlighting that a substantial number of firefighters may be affected.

Responses highlighted the potential for significant personal and financial impacts, including disruption to family life and challenges securing alternative accommodation locally. In some cases, it was suggested that these impacts may affect the ability of firefighters to remain in role.

A recurring concern was the lack of clarity on how these impacts would be managed, particularly in relation to replacement accommodation or financial support.

> *"Having to uproot to a new station would mean losing their homes and enormous upheaval for their families. Where would they live?"*

4.6.2 Accessibility of new location and on-call availability

Some responses raised concerns about the practicality of the proposed station location in relation to access for existing crews and the viability of on-call provision. These responses suggested that increased distance to the site, or characteristics of the surrounding area, may make it more difficult for on-call firefighters to attend the station, particularly at night.

This was linked to concerns that the proposal may reduce the availability of on-call personnel to crew appliances, particularly where existing staff may no longer live or work within a viable response radius.

> *"Position wise it makes sense, but the availability of nighttime crew is unrealistic."*

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4.6.3 Morale, wellbeing and workforce retention

Some responses raised concerns about the potential impact of the proposal on staff morale and wellbeing, particularly in relation to relocation and perceived lack of support. These responses suggested that such changes may reduce goodwill and negatively affect morale.

In a number of cases, this was linked to perceived risks around workforce retention, with some respondents questioning whether affected firefighters may choose to leave the service. A smaller number of responses also raised potential implications for recruitment, particularly where changes to location or working arrangements may affect the attractiveness of roles or the viability of on-call provision.

> *"Forcing staff out of their homes will not be forgiven, you will lose goodwill and morale will suffer at a time when you need to make significant changes"*

4.6.4 Perceived benefits of improved location and facilities

A smaller number of responses highlighted potential benefits of a new station location, including improved access to major routes and reduced commuting challenges compared to existing sites. In some cases, respondents suggested that a modern, consolidated facility could have positive impacts on staff experience and morale.

> *"A station set up in the North Oxford area could be better for travel arrangements for FF, greater access to trunk roads for response and a new updated work place for staff."*

4.7 Evidence base, modelling and consultation assumptions

Responses raised a range of concerns about the evidence and rationale underpinning the proposal, particularly in relation to the level of detail provided and the extent to which the proposal reflects operational realities. Across responses, there was a recurring perception that the evidence base was not sufficiently detailed or robust to support a clear assessment of the proposal's impacts

4.7.1 Lack of detail and clarity on proposal design and delivery

A recurring concern across responses was the limited detail provided on the design and delivery of the proposal, with some respondents indicating that this constrained their ability to provide informed feedback.

This was particularly evident in relation to the proposed location of the new station and how it would operate in practice. Respondents highlighted that the absence of a confirmed site made it difficult to assess the robustness of modelling, including projected response times and service impacts. This was often linked to a lack of clarity on key design and operational details, including station location, appliance provision, crewing arrangements and the configuration of specialist resources.

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Further concerns related to how specific elements of the proposal, including the future of the Rescue Tender function, would be implemented.

> *"How are we expected to provide feedback on a proposal with no information?"*

4.7.2 Concerns about the robustness and realism of modelling and assumptions

A recurring concern across responses was whether the modelling and assumptions underpinning the proposal are realistic and reflective of real-world conditions. Responses questioned whether the evidence adequately accounts for factors such as traffic, road layout, geography and the practical realities of emergency response.

Some respondents also raised concerns about the use of averages and historic data, suggesting these may mask local variation, fail to reflect current and future risk, and understate the potential impact of changes. In this context, several responses characterised the modelling as incomplete, outdated, or overly simplified, with some questioning its credibility as a basis for decision-making.

A related concern was that significant changes to service provision are being proposed on the basis of modelling perceived as uncertain or speculative, particularly where key assumptions and inputs are not fully evidenced.

A smaller number of responses viewed the available metrics as broadly supportive of the proposal but highlighted the need for more detailed scenario testing, including under peak traffic conditions and future demand.

> *"I think it's a grave error to make major changes on speculative modelling."*

4.7.3 Perceived gaps in evidence and stakeholder input

Some responses raised concerns about whether the proposal is sufficiently grounded in evidence, with a perception that it relies heavily on modelling without supporting real-world data or demonstrated outcomes.

A related concern was the extent to which the views and experience of operational staff have informed the proposal. Some respondents questioned whether firefighters and those with direct knowledge of service delivery had been adequately consulted, suggesting that this input is essential to understanding how changes would operate in practice.

Some responses also highlighted a perceived lack of evidence on how the proposal would affect workforce arrangements in practice, including the potential impact on availability, retention and day-to-day operations.

> *"Have you asked the Fire Service what their opinion is?"*

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4.7.4 Conditional support based on evidence

A smaller number of responses expressed support for the proposal based on the available evidence, suggesting that the data indicates a broadly positive approach.

However, this support was typically conditional on seeing further testing results, particularly modelling of response times in peak traffic situations, including rush hour and major events.

> *"The metrics suggest this is a sensible proposal, but it would be important to see modelling of response times in peak traffic situations such as if the new football stadium is built at the Triangle, when Blenheim events are on, and during peak rush hour."*

4.8 Financial considerations

Responses in this theme focused on the cost of the proposal, how investment should be prioritised and the strength of the financial case underpinning the changes.

Across responses, there was a recurring concern that the proposal represents a significant level of expenditure, with questions about whether this is justified, and whether resources would be better directed towards maintaining or strengthening existing services.

While some respondents perceived the proposal to be financially driven, particularly in relation to asset sales, a smaller number expressed conditional support where it was seen as improving efficiency and delivering longer-term value.

4.8.1 Perceived high cost and poor value for money

A prominent concern across responses was that the proposal would involve substantial capital expenditure, particularly in relation to the construction of a new station and associated facilities. Responses frequently described the proposal as expensive or unnecessary, with some questioning whether the scale of investment is proportionate to the anticipated benefits.

In this context, some respondents questioned whether the proposal would deliver sufficient benefit to justify the level of upfront cost.

> *"Sounds expensive and not sure the case has been made for why this is needed."*

4.8.2 Preference for reinvestment in existing services and resources

A recurring view across responses was that available funding would be better directed towards maintaining or improving existing services, rather than investing in new infrastructure.

Responses emphasised prioritising investment in frontline capacity, including retaining fire engines, maintaining station coverage, improving existing facilities and supporting staffing and crew availability, including recruitment and retention. These responses often suggested that

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such investment would represent a more effective use of resources than developing a new facility.

> *"If you have money to spend on this, you have money to spend on improving current services"*

4.8.3 Uncertainty around funding and financial assumptions

Some responses raised concerns about how the proposal would be funded and whether the financial assumptions underpinning it are realistic.

Respondents questioned the source and availability of funding, including whether sufficient capital would be available to deliver the proposal without impacting day-to-day service provision. In some cases, responses also raised concerns about the overall affordability and practical deliverability of the proposal.

A smaller number of responses questioned whether cost assumptions adequately reflect local land values and site constraints, particularly in higher-cost areas.

> *"Where would the money come from to build new station and HQ? There would be no money coming in until old sites successfully sold off, so how much would a bank loan cost?"*

4.8.4 Perceived role of asset sales in shaping the proposal (Rewley Road site)

Some responses suggested that the proposal may be driven by financial considerations, particularly in relation to the potential sale of the Rewley Road site. In this context, respondents questioned whether the release of valuable land in a central location was influencing the rationale for these changes.

> *"It feels more like it is being pushed from the Council to vacate prime real-estate land within Oxford City Centre that if sold will never be brought back into use for the fire service."*

4.8.5 Conditional support based on efficiency and long-term savings

A smaller number of responses expressed support for the proposal where it was seen as enabling more efficient use of resources, particularly through the consolidation of sites and functions.

In these cases, respondents highlighted potential benefits such as co-locating headquarters and operational facilities and reducing ongoing costs through improved infrastructure and training provision, including, in some cases, the potential to release funds from existing sites.

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However, this support was typically conditional, with respondents emphasising the need for clear evidence that these changes would deliver tangible benefits to service delivery and would not adversely affect operational capacity.

> *"Based on the context and reasoning provided this sounds like an important and significant change. The combination of HQ in a fire station could potentially save costs."*

4.9 Impact on Oxfordshire's communities

4.9.1 Increased risk to life and property due to slower response times

The most consistently identified impact across responses is the potential for longer response times across parts of Oxfordshire, particularly in Oxford city centre, southern areas and rural communities.

This is frequently linked to greater risk to life, more severe fires, and increased property damage, with respondents emphasising that even small delays can have significant consequences in time-critical emergencies. Concerns are often amplified by references to traffic congestion, longer travel distances, and reduced local coverage.

4.9.2 Loss of specialist rescue capability and increased risk in complex incidents

A prominent concern across responses is the potential removal or dilution of specialist rescue capability currently based at Kidlington, particularly the Rescue Tender.

Respondents highlight that this capability is critical for serious road traffic collisions, water rescue, and complex incidents, and argue that redistributing equipment or skills would not replicate the effectiveness of a dedicated, experienced team. This is seen as increasing the risk of slower or less effective interventions in high-impact emergencies.

4.9.3 Uneven impacts across communities, with some areas experiencing reduced protection

Some responses described the proposal as creating unequal outcomes across the county, with some areas benefiting while others experienced reduced service.

In particular, southern Oxfordshire, Henley, and rural communities are frequently identified as being at risk of slower response times and reduced coverage, leading to concerns about fairness and equitable access to emergency services.

4.9.4 Reduced overall fire cover and system resilience

Responses raised concerns that the proposal could reduce overall fire cover and system resilience, particularly through the consolidation of stations and removal of appliances.

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This is seen as weakening the service's ability to respond to multiple or concurrent incidents, increasing reliance on more distant crews and creating potential gaps in availability.

4.9.5 Negative impacts on firefighters and their families affecting service delivery

A significant number of responses highlighted impacts on firefighters and their families, particularly in relation to loss of housing, changes to working arrangements and reduced morale.

These impacts were frequently linked to concerns about staff retention, loss of experience, and reduced workforce stability, with respondents arguing that this could ultimately affect the quality, reliability and availability of emergency response for communities.

4.10 Suggestions to lessen impacts on Oxfordshire's communities

4.10.1 Maintain existing fire stations or a strong local operational presence

The most common suggestion across responses is to retain existing fire stations, particularly Rewley Road and Kidlington, or maintain a reduced but operational presence in key locations such as Oxford city centre.

Respondents frequently argue that maintaining distributed coverage is essential to avoid gaps in response, particularly in high-risk or high-demand areas. Where full retention is not supported, suggestions often include smaller stations, satellite units, or retaining at least one appliance locally to preserve rapid response capability.

4.10.2 Only proceed if response times are demonstrably equal to or better than current levels

A large number of responses emphasise that any changes should only proceed if response times are proven to be equal to or better than current levels.

This is often linked to calls for more transparent, detailed, and realistic modelling, including accounting for traffic, future development and real-world conditions. Respondents frequently suggest testing or phasing changes before full implementation to ensure impacts are understood and do not increase risk.

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4.10.3 Retain specialist rescue capability and expertise

Many responses stress the importance of maintaining the specialist rescue function at Kidlington, particularly the Rescue Tender and its dedicated crew.

This capability is seen as critical to managing complex and high-risk incidents, and respondents frequently argue that distributing equipment alone would not replicate the effectiveness of a skilled, centralised team. Retention of this capability is framed as essential to maintaining service quality and public safety.

4.10.4 Prioritise investment in existing infrastructure and local capacity

A prominent theme across responses is that impacts could be reduced by investing in current stations, workforce and on-call capacity rather than closing or merging sites.

Suggestions include improving recruitment and retention, increasing staffing levels, enhancing existing facilities and redirecting potential funding from new builds into strengthening current provision.

4.10.5 Mitigate impacts on firefighters to maintain workforce stability

Many responses highlight the need to actively support firefighters affected by the proposal, particularly in relation to housing, relocation, and changes to working arrangements.

Suggestions include retaining or replacing tied housing, offering financial support or compensation and engaging staff in planning decisions. Respondents frequently link workforce stability to community outcomes, arguing that supporting staff is essential to maintaining experienced crews and consistent emergency response.

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5 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL B

This section presents the qualitative findings relating to Additional Proposal B, exploring the reasoning, concerns and perceived impacts raised by respondents.

5.1 Overview of responses

Responses to Additional Proposal B were primarily driven by concerns about the removal of the second fire engine in Thame, particularly in relation to local capacity, system resilience and the potential impact on Thame and surrounding areas.

A central theme was the role of the second appliance as a source of backup capacity and operational flexibility, particularly where the primary appliance is already deployed. Concerns were frequently linked to Thame's local and strategic context, including major transport routes, cross-border reliance, population growth and increasing traffic.

A cross-cutting issue was whether the proposal's evidence base and modelling adequately reflect how the second appliance is used in practice, particularly under conditions of concurrent demand and variable availability.

A minority of respondents expressed support for the proposal on efficiency and financial grounds, particularly where the second appliance was described as underutilised or difficult to crew. This support was typically conditional on maintaining effective service coverage and response performance.

5.2 Headline findings by theme

Six main themes were identified, which in summary were as follows:

Operational resilience and local risk in Thame

This was a central theme across responses and focused on the role of the second appliance in maintaining local resilience and continuity of cover. Responses were primarily characterised by concern that its removal may reduce backup capacity, limit response to simultaneous or escalating incidents and increase reliance on more distant resources. These concerns were closely linked to Thame's wide catchment, major transport routes and cross-border reliance. While some respondents viewed the appliance as underused, it was more commonly seen as a critical resilience asset supporting system stability under variable demand.

Response times

Responses were primarily driven by concern that removing the second appliance may increase response times, particularly where the primary appliance is already deployed. These concerns were linked to distance, geography and the limits of average response-time modelling, which was seen as masking delays in time-critical or concurrent incidents. A recurring view was that the proposal may reduce the reliability and consistency of response for Thame and

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surrounding communities. A smaller number of respondents suggested impacts may be limited where neighbouring cover is sufficient.

Operational efficiency and use of resources at Thame

A prominent theme was differing views on how efficiency should be defined. Some respondents described the second appliance as underutilised and supported removal where resources could be redeployed to higher-demand areas. However, a more common view was that it contributes to efficiency by maintaining continuity of cover, reducing standby movements and supporting response when the primary appliance is unavailable. Overall, responses reflected a tension between efficiency as utilisation and efficiency as maintaining sufficient capacity and resilience.

Evidence base, modelling and consultation assumptions

Responses focused on whether the evidence base was sufficiently robust to support removal. A recurring concern was that reliance on averages and historic data may not reflect real-world conditions, particularly concurrent demand, cross-border pressures and future risk. Some respondents also questioned the transparency and completeness of the evidence. While a smaller number viewed the data as supportive, many indicated that the current evidence does not provide sufficient confidence in the proposal's local impact.

Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Responses recognised workforce availability as a key constraint, particularly within the on-call model. Some accepted that removal may be necessary where the appliance cannot be reliably crewed. However, responses were more commonly characterised by the view that staffing challenges should be addressed through recruitment, retention and alternative crewing models rather than reducing capacity. In this context, low usage was often seen as a consequence of workforce issues rather than lack of need.

Financial considerations

Responses reflected differing views on the financial case for removal. Some supported the proposal on cost-effectiveness grounds, particularly where the appliance was seen as underutilised. However, a recurring concern was that savings may be limited relative to the potential loss of resilience and operational capacity. Many responses emphasised that financial efficiency should not come at the expense of service provision or community safety.

The following sections explore each theme, including the key issues raised, areas of agreement and divergence and perceived impacts.

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5.3 Operational resilience and local Risk in Thame

Responses within this theme focus on the role of the second fire engine as a source of local resilience, providing immediate back-up capacity, operational flexibility and the ability to respond to multiple or complex incidents in Thame and surrounding areas.

Respondents frequently linked this role to Thame's local and strategic risk profile, including major transport routes, cross-border activity and a wide rural catchment. In this context, the second appliance was often viewed not as a high-frequency resource, but as a critical resilience asset, particularly in situations where incidents overlap, escalate, or occur under high-demand conditions.

5.3.1 Role of the second appliance in maintaining local cover and system stability

Respondents highlighted the role of the second appliance in maintaining local response capability when the primary appliance is deployed. This was linked to the frequency of mobilisation within Thame and surrounding areas, with concerns that removing the second appliance could leave no immediate local cover and increase reliance on more distant resources.

A related theme was the role of the second appliance in supporting wider system stability. Some responses suggested it may reduce the need for standby moves, helping to maintain availability across neighbouring stations and limiting the redistribution of resources across the network. In this context, the second appliance was viewed as contributing to continuity of cover both locally and across the wider system.

> *"Removing any fire engine has a negative impact. Let's look at what happens now. As soon as there is no truck available in Thame a standby truck gets sent to cover the area. Taking the second truck instead of helping recruit causes you to have to send a standby truck more frequently and taking that truck away from its own area."*

5.3.2 Simultaneous incidents and surge capacity around Thame

Responses emphasised the role of the second appliance in enabling the service to respond to simultaneous incidents and periods of increased demand. Respondents described scenarios in which the primary appliance is already committed, leaving no local resource available to respond to a second incident.

This was linked to wider system pressures affecting Thame, including demand associated with major routes such as the M40. Some respondents referred to recent incidents where both appliances were deployed, suggesting that concurrent demand is not uncommon.

In this context, removing the second appliance was seen as reducing the service's ability to respond to multiple incidents, increasing reliance on appliances attending from further afield, and limiting operational effectiveness at larger or more complex incidents where multiple appliances are required to ensure safe and effective operations. The second appliance was

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also described as providing resilience during maintenance, breakdown, or periods of high demand.

> *"Emergency planning should be built around what happens on the worst days, not what happens on an average day, especially when incidents can overlap or escalate quickly. This is also a real concern for rural communities, where response times are already longer and less predictable due to distance and road networks. Taking away local back-up increases the chance that support will have to come from further afield, making delays more likely just when rapid reinforcement is most needed."*

5.3.3 Wider network and cross-border resilience

Some responses highlighted the role of the second appliance at Thame within a wider, networked fire service system, particularly in relation to cross-border working and mutual aid. Respondents described Thame as both supporting and relying on neighbouring services.

Thame was described as contributing to coverage for surrounding areas, including nearby towns and villages, major transport routes such as the M40 and stations with lower availability. Some responses also raised concerns about pressures affecting neighbouring services in Buckinghamshire, including proposed changes to station provision in locations such as Haddenham and Stokenchurch.

In this context, removing the second appliance was seen as potentially reducing Thame's ability to support cross-border incidents while increasing reliance on neighbouring services that may themselves have limited availability. Some responses suggested that reductions in capacity across both areas could weaken mutual aid arrangements and overall network resilience.

> *"We are relying on support from our neighbouring counties who are also going through periods of change and cuts, facing the same challenges as us. Can we not work with them to find a solution?"*

5.3.4 Local resilience, back-up capacity and future demand in Thame

Responses emphasised the importance of planning for future demand and evolving risk, rather than relying solely on current activity levels. The second appliance was frequently described as providing reserve or contingency capacity within a changing risk environment.

Respondents referenced population growth, increased traffic and Thame's wide catchment area, including surrounding rural communities and major routes such as the M40. These factors were seen as contributing to both increased incident risk and greater demand on local resources. Some responses also highlighted emerging risks, including extreme weather, environmental pressures and new development.

A recurring theme across responses was that emergency planning should be based on potential peak demand and worst-case scenarios, rather than average levels of activity. In this context, spare or contingency capacity was seen as having a protective value, even where

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usage is infrequent. The second appliance was therefore viewed as providing resilience against unpredictable, high-impact incidents not captured in current demand modelling.

Some responses also questioned whether the proposal appropriately balances cost savings against future risk, suggesting that removing capacity now may reduce the service's ability to respond effectively to changing conditions over time.

"Having more capacity than needed is crucial for the unknown. With new homes, buildings & the huge increase in vehicles on the road especially electric that have batteries that have many fires this cut is a backward step"

Overall, responses suggest that the second appliance is primarily understood as a resilience asset, valued for its role in maintaining local cover, supporting response to complex or concurrent incidents, and providing capacity within a growing and strategically exposed area.

5.4 Response times

Responses within this theme are driven by concerns about the loss of immediate local backup capacity following the removal of the second appliance at Thame, and the implications this may have for the speed, reliability and consistency of emergency response.

Across responses, the second appliance is commonly described as providing secondary response capacity and supporting operational resilience, particularly in scenarios where the primary appliance is already deployed. Its removal is therefore associated with increased reliance on resources travelling from further afield, with potential implications for attendance times, response under concurrent demand, and overall operational flexibility across the local area and wider network.

5.4.1 Potential for increased response times

Responses suggest that removing the second appliance would increase response times, particularly where incidents are attended by resources travelling from neighbouring stations. Greater travel distances were seen as a key driver of delay, especially in a geographically wide catchment area and along major routes such as the M40.

A recurring concern was that, where no local appliance is available, subsequent incidents may experience longer wait times before a crew can attend. This was frequently linked to scenarios in which the primary appliance is already deployed, leaving no immediate local response capability. Some responses also suggested that demand would be redistributed rather than reduced, meaning incidents currently attended locally may require response from further afield.

Some respondents also highlighted that delays may be more pronounced at certain times, including overnight or during periods of higher demand, where resource availability may be more constrained.

More broadly, some respondents expressed the view that reducing the total number of appliances within the system would inevitably lead to increased response times, regardless of redistribution or modelling assumptions.

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"If one engine is already out and another job comes in an engine would need to come in from Oxford a travel time of 20 minutes. Could be the difference between life and death."

5.4.2 Perceived limitations of response-time modelling

Respondents frequently questioned the use of average response times as a measure of impact, suggesting that averages may not reflect the variability and urgency of real emergency situations. Comments emphasised that individual incidents, particularly those involving risk to life, require immediate response and may not be fully represented through overall averages.

Some responses expressed concern that modelling assumptions may understate potential delays, particularly where factors such as traffic, geography and resource availability are not fully accounted for. A further theme was that localised impacts in and around Thame may not be visible within wider county-level averages, leading to a perception that the scale of impact may be understated.

Some responses also suggested that reliance on average response times may obscure worst-case scenarios, particularly where multiple incidents occur or local resources are unavailable.

"I strongly disagree with your analysis that the main negative impact will be a two second delay of response time. This does not take into account situations where two engines are needed simultaneously..."

5.4.3 Existing response times and service performance

Respondents referred to existing response times, suggesting that they are already longer than expected and could worsen if capacity is reduced. In several cases, respondents compared current performance to national averages and expressed concern that existing response times are already below expected standards.

These longer response times were frequently associated with increased risk to life, greater property damage, and reduced effectiveness of emergency response, particularly in time-critical or high-risk incidents.

"Even with two appliances response times are significantly above the national average: removal of one appliance cannot result in an improvement, and therefore population safety compromised."

5.4.4 View suggesting limited impact on response times

A smaller number of responses suggested that the proposal may have limited impact on response times, particularly where alternative provision from neighbouring stations is sufficient to maintain overall coverage.

"Although cutting a fire engine is always a difficult thing to do, if response times are not affected and other appliances can be used as a second appliance to Thame then this is a consideration"

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5.5 Operational efficiency and use of resources at Thame

Responses within this theme focus on how operational efficiency is understood in the context of removing the second appliance at Thame.

A central tension across responses was whether efficiency is best defined in terms of resource utilisation and cost-effectiveness, or in terms of maintaining sufficient capacity to support stable and flexible system performance, particularly under variable or concurrent demand.

Views were frequently conditional, with support for removal typically dependent on whether alternative arrangements can maintain response performance, service levels and overall system resilience.

5.5.1 Perceived efficiency gains from reallocating the second appliance

Some responses describe the second appliance as a low-utilisation resource, with limited mobilisation and inconsistent crewing cited as indicators that it may not represent an efficient use of resources.

Respondents adopting this view often emphasise the benefits of reallocating or redeploying the appliance, or associated resources, to areas of higher demand where they may deliver greater operational value. In some cases, this includes suggestions that the appliance could be relocated, replaced with a different type of vehicle or otherwise used more effectively elsewhere in the system.

A related view is that concentrating available staff on a single, reliably crewed appliance may represent a more efficient model of provision, particularly where maintaining two appliances reduces overall availability.

Some responses also express confidence that a single appliance at Thame, supported by neighbouring stations or wholetime crews, would be sufficient to maintain service coverage without materially affecting response performance.

> *"An underutilised resource being reallocated elsewhere where it will get used more fits with the theme of improved efficiency."*

5.5.2 Efficiency of retaining the second appliance within the system

Other responses argue that the second appliance contributes to overall system efficiency by supporting continuity of cover and reducing the need for standby moves or reactive redistribution of resources.

In this view, the appliance plays an important role beyond direct mobilisation, helping to maintain availability across neighbouring stations and limiting disruption across the wider network. Its value is also linked to providing additional capacity where the primary appliance is already committed, particularly in more complex or resource-intensive incidents.

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A smaller number of responses suggest that lower utilisation may reflect current crewing or deployment practices, rather than lack of need and that the appliance could represent a more efficient asset if used more effectively.

> *"Second fire engines play an important role in larger or more complex incidents, providing depth, flexibility, and resilience..."*

5.5.3 Conditional views on efficiency and availability

A proportion of responses adopt a conditional position, linking efficiency to both utilisation and deliverability. Retention is more often supported where the appliance can be reliably crewed and is seen to contribute to operational effectiveness. Conversely, removal is seen as more justifiable where availability constraints limit its practical use, particularly where resources can be redeployed without negatively affecting response times, service levels or overall system resilience.

> *"From an efficiency perspective, it is understandable to question the value of maintaining a second engine that is infrequently mobilised... However, second fire engines play an important role in larger or more complex incidents, providing depth, flexibility, and resilience..."*

5.6 Evidence, modelling and consultation assumptions

Responses within this theme focus on the robustness of the evidence used to justify removing the second appliance at Thame, including the data presented and the modelling approach.

A central issue across responses was whether the evidence used is sufficient to reflect how a second appliance is used in practice, particularly in scenarios involving concurrent demand or reliance on more distant resources.

5.6.1 Reliance on averages and limited local visibility of impact

A recurring concern was the reliance on average response-time modelling to assess the impact of the proposal. Several responses questioned whether small, modelled differences are realistic when considered against actual travel distances between Thame and neighbouring stations. Responses also suggested that averages may obscure the **localised impact** of removing a second appliance, particularly where the primary appliance is already deployed or a second response is required quickly. Some responses further noted that averages do not reflect the urgency of time-critical incidents.

> *"Your modelling says that a 2nd engine response would only be 2 seconds later... Please tell me how a 2nd engine... can get from Wallingford, Crowmarsh or Wheatley... only 2 seconds slower than from Thame... I think you need to look at your modelling methodology because it looks flawed to me."*

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5.6.2 Concerns about modelling assumptions and operational realism

Concerns were also raised about whether the modelling reflects real-world operational conditions. Several responses suggested that the analysis may not fully capture concurrent incidents, escalation or periods where neighbouring resources are unavailable. Some respondents also indicated that the consultation does not provide sufficient detail on how the second appliance is used in practice or how alternative cover would operate, leading to calls for more scenario-based analysis.

> *"I strongly disagree with your analysis that the main negative impact will be a two second delay of response time. This does not take into account situations where two engines are needed simultaneously..."*

5.6.3 Data quality, completeness and transparency

Responses raised concerns about the quality and clarity of the data presented. Some responses highlighted the use of approximate figures and questioned whether all relevant activity, including standby moves, is captured. Others questioned whether the data period is representative, particularly where COVID-affected years may distort demand. Further concerns related to transparency, with calls for clearer explanation of how data has been constructed and interpreted.

> *"I would also need to see how many times the appliance was actually mobilised, including to cover moves, etc as it is not just actual incidents attended that count."*

5.6.4 Cross-border demand and mutual aid not clearly reflected

Responses raised concerns about whether the evidence sufficiently reflects cross-border demand and mutual aid. Several responses questioned whether incidents across county boundaries and pressures on neighbouring services have been fully accounted for, particularly given Thame's proximity to Buckinghamshire.

> *"I don't see an adverse impact here but do the calculations take into account deployment in or out of Oxfordshire by Buckinghamshire FRS?"*

5.6.5 Lack of forward-looking evidence

Responses raised concerns that the proposal relies on historic data, without sufficient consideration of future demand and risk. Several responses highlighted housing growth, increasing traffic and environmental pressures as factors that may increase demand over time.

> *"The county's population continues to grow, you need to take that into account ... historical data doesn't account for that."*

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5.6.6 Views supporting the use of evidence

A smaller number of responses indicated that the evidence supports the proposal, highlighting low levels of mobilisation and expressing confidence that overall coverage would be maintained.

"The statistics don't lie - difficult to justify keeping two engines."

5.7 Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Responses within this theme engage directly with workforce and the challenges of the on-call model, as a key constraint affecting the viability of the second appliance at Thame. Across responses, there is broad recognition of this challenge, but differing views on whether removal of the appliance represents an appropriate or effective response.

5.7.1 Recognition of crewing constraints

Responses acknowledge the difficulty of consistently crewing the second appliance, particularly during daytime periods. These responses reference low availability, reliance on overtime, and wider challenges associated with the on-call model. In this context, some respondents state that, where the appliance cannot be reliably crewed, its removal may be a pragmatic or necessary decision.

"If you have not got the crew then I understand why you would remove it."

5.7.2 Address workforce issues rather than remove capacity

A contrasting view across responses is that, while workforce availability is a recognised issue, removing the second appliance does not address the underlying problem. Instead, respondents argue that low usage is primarily a consequence of staffing constraints, rather than lack of operational need.

These responses emphasise the importance of improving recruitment, retention and support for on-call firefighters, suggesting that workforce challenges should be addressed through investment and reform rather than by reducing operational capacity.

"The problem is on-call staff. Improve that before removing resources."

5.7.3 Workforce impact: morale, retention and long-term viability

Some responses raise concerns about the potential impact of removing the second appliance on workforce sustainability. These include perceived risks to morale, retention and engagement among on-call firefighters, as well as the potential weakening of team structures within the station.

A number of responses also reference experiences at other stations, suggesting that removal of appliances may contribute to declining availability over time and affect the longer-term viability of remaining resources.

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"You're just going to lose more on-call firefighters."

5.7.4 Alternative workforce and crewing approaches

Some responses propose alternative approaches to addressing workforce constraints, rather than removing the appliance. These include introducing day-crewed or wholetime models, improving recruitment strategies and making more flexible use of existing crews.

Some responses also suggest that the second appliance could be better utilised if workforce issues were addressed, indicating that the current level of use may not fully reflect its potential value within the system.

"An uncrewed fire engine is a problem, but crewing is the main problem, improve the retention and recruitment of on call fire fighters."

5.8 Financial considerations

Responses raised differing views on the financial case for removing the second appliance at Thame, particularly in relation to value for money, the scale of potential savings and the balance between cost efficiency and maintaining service provision.

A central tension across responses was whether the appliance represents an inefficient use of limited resources due to relatively low utilisation, or whether its removal would deliver only limited financial benefit while reducing operational capacity.

5.8.1 Lack of cost-effectiveness of the secondary appliance

Responses suggested that retaining a second appliance with relatively low levels of mobilisation represents an inefficient use of financial and staffing resources. These responses referenced the ongoing costs associated with maintaining, crewing and equipping the appliance, alongside its perceived limited use and questioned whether public funds should be allocated to a resource that is not consistently deployed.

"29 incidents per year does not justify spending circa £400k on a fully equipped appliance."

5.8.2 Reallocation of resources to maximise wider system benefit

A related theme was that removing the second appliance could release resources for use elsewhere in the service. Responses highlighted the potential to redirect funding and capacity towards areas of higher demand or greater operational impact, framing reallocation as a means of improving overall efficiency and value for money across the system. In this context, some responses viewed the reduction in local provision as a necessary trade-off to achieve wider system benefit.

"This frees up finance for elsewhere, it's currently not cost effective."

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5.8.3 Limited financial benefit of removal

In contrast, some responses questioned whether the financial savings associated with removal are sufficiently significant to justify the loss of capacity.

These responses suggested that the cost of retaining the appliance may be relatively low in the context of overall service expenditure, and that any savings may be offset by indirect costs, including increased reliance on neighbouring stations or additional resource movements.

> *"The monetary savings of removing the second engine do not seem to be significant enough to warrant the removal."*

5.8.4 Perception of cost reduction over service provision

A further strand of responses expressed concern that the proposal is driven primarily by cost reduction rather than service improvement. These responses emphasised that financial considerations should not outweigh the need to maintain effective emergency response capability, particularly where reductions in capacity may impact service quality, resilience, or community safety.

"This again seems like a proposal to save money rather than improve the service."

5.9 Impacts on Oxfordshire's communities - Additional Proposal B

5.9.1 Reduced immediate local backup and increased risk during concurrent incidents

Respondents expressed concern that removing the second appliance would reduce immediate backup capacity when the primary fire engine is already deployed. This was seen as increasing the risk that simultaneous or escalating incidents may not receive a timely response.

This was seen as increasing the likelihood of delays to critical interventions, particularly in situations involving multiple incidents, prolonged operations or rapidly developing emergencies.

5.9.2 Longer response times for additional resources and increased risk to life

Many respondents highlighted that, without a second local appliance, additional support would need to travel from further afield. This was seen as leading to longer and less predictable response times for second or supporting crews.

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Respondents associated these delays with increased risk to life, property and firefighter safety, particularly where early reinforcement is critical to controlling incidents.

5.9.3 Reduced protection for Thame, surrounding villages and edge-of-county communities

Impacts were frequently described in relation to Thame, its surrounding villages, and edge-of-county communities. The proposal was seen as reducing overall fire cover across a wide and partly rural area.

These communities were described as more exposed due to distance, constrained road access, and reliance on limited alternative cover, including cross-border or more distant resources. The potential impact was seen as particularly significant for areas already experiencing longer or less predictable response times.

5.9.4 Reduced resilience during major incidents and along key transport routes

Respondents consistently raised concerns about the ability of the service to respond effectively during periods of high demand or major incidents. The second appliance was described as contributing to surge capacity and operational flexibility.

Its removal was seen as reducing the system's ability to manage large-scale incidents, including those occurring on major transport routes such as the M40, as well as overlapping or complex emergencies, increasing reliance on already committed or distant resources.

5.9.5 Impacts on community confidence and perceived safety

A number of responses highlighted the potential impact on how safe communities feel, particularly where visible local capacity is reduced. The presence of two appliances was associated with reassurance and preparedness for worst-case scenarios.

The removal of the second appliance was therefore seen as likely to reduce public confidence in local fire cover, particularly in a context of population growth, increasing demand and wider service changes.

5.9.6 Potential positive impacts from resource reallocation

A smaller number of respondents considered that the proposal could have wider benefits if resources are reallocated to areas of greater demand across Oxfordshire.

These responses suggested that this may improve overall service efficiency or coverage elsewhere in the county.

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5.10 Suggestions to lessen the impact on Oxfordshire's communities – Additional Proposal B

5.10.1 Retain the second appliance at Thame

The most consistent suggestion was to retain the second fire engine at Thame, with many respondents viewing this as the clearest way to avoid reduced backup capacity, slower second-appliance response, and greater reliance on distant cover.

5.10.2 Improve recruitment, retention and support for on-call crews

Responses argued that the key issue is appliance availability rather than lack of need. Suggested mitigations focused on stronger recruitment and retention activity, improved support for on-call firefighters, greater employer engagement and continued use of Station Support Officers.

5.10.3 Invest in training and operational readiness

Many responses called for greater investment in training, qualifications and support to improve the availability and usability of the second appliance, rather than removing it.

5.10.4 Consider alternative or flexible crewing models

Some respondents suggested retaining the appliance through more flexible arrangements, such as reserve, surge or peak-demand use, or through alternative staffing models where full-time availability cannot be maintained.

5.10.5 Strengthen neighbouring and cross-border cover arrangements

A smaller group of responses suggested that, if changes proceed, clearer and more robust cover arrangements with neighbouring stations and Buckinghamshire should be in place to reduce the impact on Thame and surrounding communities.

5.10.6 Monitor impacts and review the decision

Some responses suggested a more cautious approach, including formal monitoring and review of response times, resilience and local impacts if any change is implemented.

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6 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: ADDITIONAL PROPOSAL C

6.1 Overview of responses

Responses to Additional Proposal C were predominantly characterised by concern, and in many cases opposition; focused on the closure of local fire stations and the potential impacts on community safety, response times and system resilience.

Respondents emphasised the importance of maintaining immediate local cover in and around Woodstock, Eynsham and Henley, particularly given their rural geography, distinct risk profiles and limited alternative provision. Concerns centred on increased reliance on more distant resources, potential delays in response, and reduced capacity during periods of high demand or concurrent incidents.

Respondents also questioned whether the evidence and modelling underpinning the proposal fully reflect real-world conditions, local variation and future risk, with particular scepticism about the use of average response times.

A smaller number of respondents expressed conditional support, primarily on efficiency grounds, subject to maintaining effective service coverage and avoiding reductions in protection.

6.2 Headline findings by theme

Six main themes were identified, which in summary were as follows:

Local stations, community safety and emergency cover

This was a central theme across responses and focused on the role of local fire stations in maintaining immediate emergency cover and community protection. Responses were primarily characterised by concern that closing stations in Woodstock, Eynsham and Henley may reduce local fire cover, increase reliance on more distant resources and weaken protection for rural, edge-of-county and higher-risk communities. These concerns were closely linked to local risk profiles, future growth and the wider safety role of stations as community assets. While a smaller number of respondents supported closure on efficiency grounds, this was typically conditional on maintaining effective alternative cover.

Response times

Responses to this theme were primarily driven by concern that closing local stations may increase response times, particularly in communities that would become more reliant on appliances travelling from further away. These concerns were closely linked to travel distance, congestion, local road conditions and the view that average response-time modelling may mask more significant impacts in specific places and during high-demand periods. A recurring view was that even if county-wide averages change only marginally, delays in affected communities may still be operationally significant.

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Operational capacity and effectiveness

A prominent theme across responses was the role of local stations in supporting wider operational capacity and system resilience. Responses were often characterised by the view that closures may reduce backup capacity, limit flexibility during concurrent or major incidents and increase reliance on already committed or more distant resources. Some respondents also emphasised that stations with variable availability still contribute contingency capacity during periods of pressure. A smaller number suggested that capacity could be maintained through neighbouring stations or wider network changes, though this was generally conditional on those arrangements being reliable in practice.

Evidence base, modelling and consultation assumptions

Responses in this theme focused on whether the evidence base was sufficiently robust to support station closures. A recurring concern was that the modelling relies too heavily on average response times and historic data, and may not fully reflect local variation, operational complexity, future growth or high-impact scenarios. Some respondents also questioned the completeness, transparency and realism of the data and assumptions used. While a smaller number accepted the statistical case for change, many indicated that the current evidence does not provide sufficient confidence in the proposal's local impact.

Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Responses within this theme recognised workforce availability as a genuine issue, particularly in relation to the sustainability of the on-call model. However, responses were more commonly characterised by the view that low availability reflects recruitment and retention challenges rather than lack of need for the stations themselves. In this context, many respondents argued that staffing issues should be addressed through recruitment, training, incentives and employer engagement rather than by removing local infrastructure. Some also raised concerns that closures may further weaken morale, visibility and longer-term workforce resilience.

Financial considerations

Responses reflected differing views on the financial case for station closures. Some respondents supported the proposal on efficiency grounds, particularly where stations were seen as low-activity or difficult to staff, and where resources could be redirected to areas of greater demand. However, a more prominent concern was that financial savings may come at the expense of local protection, resilience and future flexibility. Many responses emphasised that value for money should not be judged solely in terms of current activity levels where closures may reduce capacity in communities perceived to face distinct or evolving risks.

The following sections explore each theme, including the key issues raised, areas of agreement and divergence and perceived impacts.

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6.3 Local stations, community Safety and emergency Cover

Responses relating to this theme emphasise the importance of local fire stations in providing immediate emergency cover. Across responses, concerns are primarily framed around the potential loss of local provision and the implications for response times, risk and protection in communities in and around Henley, Eynsham and Woodstock.

6.3.1 Local provision and immediate emergency response

Respondents argued that closing local fire stations would reduce immediate emergency cover for communities currently served by those stations. Concerns centred on increased reliance on appliances travelling from further away, with potential implications for the speed of initial response. This was frequently linked to perceived increased risks to life and property, with some respondents framing closures as placing communities in direct danger.

Respondents also emphasised the role of local fire stations in protecting communities, particularly in areas perceived to be more exposed or vulnerable, including rural locations and populations such as older people or those requiring additional support.

> *"You will lose vital fire cover... You will be putting local residents at risk with slower response times."*

6.3.2 Distance to cover and reliance on more distant resources

Respondents raised concerns that closing local stations would reduce fire cover in rural and more isolated areas, increasing reliance on appliances travelling from further away. This was seen as particularly significant in communities located at a distance from other stations, including those in the south of the county and along county boundaries, with some respondents suggesting these areas would be disproportionately affected.

Concerns centred on the reliability of this alternative cover, particularly where neighbouring or cross-border resources may already be committed or subject to competing demands. In this context, reliance on external provision was often viewed as uncertain and insufficient to replace local capacity, with rural and edge-of-county areas perceived to be more exposed as a result.

> *"Local stations are important to provide swift cover. It is dangerous to leave rural communities reliant on engines some distance away, particularly if it is a very busy time with multiple demands. They also have local knowledge that others further away lack, which may be vital."*

6.3.3 Specific local risk profiles requiring rapid nearby response

Some respondents highlighted that the characteristics of particular areas create distinct local risk profiles, where rapid nearby response is seen as especially important. These responses emphasise that the need for immediate fire cover is shaped not only by incident frequency, but by the nature and complexity of local risks.

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Examples include historic and heritage buildings, dense town centres and nationally significant sites, where fires may spread quickly and have more severe consequences. Respondents also referred to periods of increased demand linked to major events and tourism, which can increase population density, traffic congestion and access constraints.

Environmental and infrastructure-related risks were also highlighted, including flooding from the River Thames and accident risks associated with major transport routes such as the A40, alongside access challenges in areas with narrow or congested roads. In addition, some responses pointed to commercial and industrial sites, as well as the presence of schools, care settings and older populations, where delayed response may have greater implications.

> *"We would be left very vulnerable and at danger. We are a historic town with old buildings, a very large population at certain times of the year and a river which puts the population at risk."*

6.3.4 Local knowledge, community presence and wider safety role

Respondents emphasised that locally based crews bring detailed knowledge of the communities they serve, including familiarity with local roads, buildings and risk factors. This place-based knowledge was seen as supporting faster and more effective responses, as well as informing prevention and community safety activity.

Beyond emergency response, local fire stations were described as visible and embedded community assets, contributing to reassurance, trust and ongoing engagement. In this context, stations were understood not only as response infrastructure, but as locally trusted institutions that support prevention work, first-response capability and community resilience, particularly in areas with more limited access to other emergency services. As such, their removal was often seen as reducing these wider community safety functions.

> *"Local crews have local knowledge, they know the area, are aware of local risks, know shortcuts and know their Station ground. They also offer valuable fire safety advice and promote recruitment at local events. They give so much 'unquantifiable' benefits to the local Community in terms of safety, recruitment and support."*

6.3.5 Wider resilience and future demand

Respondents raised concerns that future demand and risk may increase in areas currently served by the stations proposed for closure and that reducing local provision may be short-sighted in this context. These responses emphasised that the need for fire and rescue services is likely to evolve over time, shaped by population growth, development and wider environmental pressures.

In particular, respondents referred to planned housing growth and expansion in Woodstock, Eynsham and Henley, suggesting that increasing populations could lead to higher demand and place additional pressure on surrounding stations if local provision is reduced.

Some responses also highlighted changing risk profiles associated with development and infrastructure, including increased traffic, new building types and emerging risks linked to

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technologies such as electric vehicles. Broader long-term pressures, including climate change and environmental risk, were also referenced as factors that may influence the frequency or severity of incidents.

In this context, some respondents expressed concern that permanently closing stations could reduce flexibility to respond to future changes in demand or risk, and that restoring capacity at a later stage may be difficult

> *"Eynsham is to be expanded by 2500 new homes... To even think of taking the fire station away is irresponsible."*

6.3.6 Cumulative impacts of proposals on fire cover

Some responses considered Additional Proposal C in the context of wider changes to the fire and rescue system, particularly the proposed closure of Kidlington Fire Station and the development of a new North Oxford station (Additional Proposal A).

Concerns centred on the cumulative impact of implementing multiple changes in combination, with respondents suggesting this could create gaps in coverage if existing stations are removed before alternative provision is fully operational. This was associated with increased reliance on more distant resources, reduced accessibility in areas currently served by strategically located stations and greater uncertainty around overall system resilience.

These respondents emphasised that the impact of closing stations such as Woodstock, Eynsham and Henley depends on how these changes interact across the wider network, highlighting the importance of sequencing changes carefully and ensuring that new provision is in place and demonstrably effective before existing stations are removed.

A smaller number of responses suggested that, if appropriately located and resourced, a new North Oxford station could maintain or improve overall coverage.

> *"...along with the closure of Kidlington fire station, there will be a huge area in the centre of the county, with low levels of fire cover."*

6.4 Response times

Response-time considerations were a key component of responses to Additional Proposal C, including concerns about the modelling used, the practical realities of travel and coverage, and the potential impact on local response times.

6.4.1 Concerns about response-time modelling and use of averages

Respondents expressed scepticism about the response-time modelling presented in the consultation, particularly the suggestion that station closures would result in only marginal changes to average response times. These findings were frequently viewed as not credible or reflective of real-world conditions.

Concerns centred on the use of county-wide averages, which respondents argued obscure local impacts and mask more significant increases in response times for affected communities.

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Some respondents also questioned the robustness and transparency of the underlying data, suggesting more localised analysis would be required to understand impacts in specific areas.

> *"... the average response figures quoted disguise the very large effect on local response times... the '1 second' increase in response times is clearly false, as it relates to Oxfordshire average times not local response times."*

6.4.2 Travel distance and local conditions

Concerns about the modelling were often linked to perceptions that it does not fully reflect the practical realities of response, particularly in relation to travel distance and local conditions.

Respondents suggested that closing local fire stations would increase travel distances to incidents, particularly in more rural and dispersed areas, leading to greater reliance on neighbouring stations and slower initial response.

Concerns also focused on whether the modelling adequately captures real-world travel conditions, including traffic congestion, roadworks, seasonal events and access constraints, particularly in areas with known bottlenecks or high visitor numbers.

In this context, locally based appliances were seen as more likely to reach nearby incidents quickly than cover travelling from further away, with distance, geography and traffic conditions seen as sources of delay. Some respondents also suggested that existing response times are already stretched, and that reducing local capacity could risk further deterioration.

Delays were also seen as more pronounced during periods of high demand or concurrent incidents, where reliance on more distant or already committed resources could further extend response times.

> *"I don't believe the statements about response time being affected by a few seconds given the distances that would need to be covered by appliances having to travel five to ten miles to reach a fire in the centre of those three locations."*

6.5 Operational capacity and effectiveness

Responses within this theme focus on the role of local fire stations in supporting operational capacity and resilience across the wider network. Concerns are framed around how the system would function under pressure, particularly during periods of increased or concurrent demand.

6.5.1 Operational capacity under pressure and during multiple or major incidents

Respondents argued that local stations provide nearby, immediately available appliances able to respond to secondary or concurrent incidents when other resources are already deployed. They were also described as supporting escalation, including providing additional crews, second appliances or reinforcement at ongoing incidents.

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Closing stations was therefore viewed as reducing local backup, increasing reliance on more distant or already committed resources, and limiting the service's ability to maintain effective response across multiple incidents.

> *"Don't you realise multiple calls can happen at once?!"*

6.5.2 Role of variable-availability stations in system resilience

Some respondents further highlighted that stations with variable or lower availability may still contribute to overall capacity, particularly during periods of high demand. Reduced availability was not seen as equivalent to no value, with stations described as providing additional or contingency cover when nearby resources are already committed.

Closures were therefore seen as reducing flexibility within the system and increasing reliance on a smaller number of locations. Some responses also referred to wider operational roles, including hosting or crewing specialist or support units, which were seen as contributing to overall capability but not always fully reflected in the consultation analysis.

More broadly, closures were described as a permanent reduction in system capacity, even where day-to-day availability is variable.

> *"Even though these stations struggle to make the appliance available I do think having them as an option would be a good thing for the service."*

6.5.3 Perceived ability to maintain capacity through alternative provision

A smaller number of respondents suggested that operational capacity could be maintained, or in some cases improved, through alternative provision across the wider network. This included reliance on neighbouring stations, cross-border support, or the proposed North Oxford station to provide cover for areas affected by closures.

Some respondents argued that stations with low activity or availability may not justify continued operation if equivalent or improved cover can be delivered from elsewhere. Others suggested that concentrating resources in fewer, more reliably crewed locations could support more consistent service delivery.

However, this view was typically conditional on the assumption that alternative provision would be sufficient and consistently available.

> *"Given the figures provided, this sounds like a sensible way to redirect investment."*

6.6 Evidence base, modelling and consultation assumptions

Responses within this theme focus on the robustness of the evidence underpinning the proposal, including the data used, modelling approach and presentation of findings. Concerns centre on accuracy, transparency, and whether the evidence reflects real-world conditions and future risk.

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6.6.1 Over-reliance on averages masks local and high-impact risk

Respondents questioned the reliance on average response times, suggesting these do not reflect operational reality. Averages were seen as masking local variation and more significant impacts in specific areas, as well as failing to capture more complex scenarios such as concurrent incidents, committed resources or disrupted conditions.

Small differences presented in the modelling (often described as one or two seconds) were widely seen as insufficient to justify permanent changes to infrastructure and service provision. In this context, some respondents described the evidential case for change as marginal or unconvincing.

Some responses also called for greater consideration of higher-impact scenarios, including major incidents or peak demand, alongside more localised analysis to understand impacts at a community level.

> *"A single incident delayed by 5–10 minutes is invisible in an average."*

6.6.2 Data quality, completeness and transparency

Respondents questioned the accuracy, completeness and transparency of the data underpinning the proposal. Concerns included the use of outdated datasets, omission of relevant activity, and inconsistencies in reported figures.

Some responses suggested that incident, availability and response-time data may not capture the full range of operational activity, particularly in border areas where cross-county incidents form a significant part of demand.

Others raised concerns about the time period used for analysis, including reliance on COVID-affected years or temporary operating conditions, which were seen as not fully representative of current service activity.

Some respondents also identified perceived inconsistencies between figures presented in consultation materials or public engagement, suggesting the evidence base may not reflect the most recent operational position.

More broadly, some responses suggested that the evidence relies on a narrow set of indicators, which may not capture wider operational roles such as cross-cover, specialist functions or contributions to system resilience.

> *"…the figures on cover don't tell the whole story."*

6.6.3 Modelling assumptions and transparency

Respondents raised concerns that modelling assumptions do not fully reflect how the service operates in practice. In particular, some responses suggested that assumptions about resource availability do not account for concurrent incidents, disrupted conditions or wider system pressures.

Some respondents also called for greater transparency around the modelling approach, with a perception that the analysis may not fully capture operational complexity or provide a sufficiently robust basis for decision-making.

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"Modelling is not the same as reality."

6.6.4 Lack of forward-looking evidence

Some responses suggest that the evidence base relies too heavily on historic data and does not sufficiently account for future changes in risk, including population growth, development and climate-related and environmental risks such as flooding or wildfires.

> *"Statistics don't tell the whole story either as they are based on past performance and not …the future."*

6.6.5 Views supporting the use of evidence

A smaller number of responses supported the use of evidence in the consultation or accepted the statistical case for change. In these responses, operational data was seen as an appropriate basis for decision-making, particularly where stations were described as having consistently low staffing availability.

> *"This decision has to be taken on the basis of the overall picture of available assets and also the history of crew availability for the appliance."*

6.7 Workforce sustainability, recruitment and retention

Responses within this theme focus on workforce challenges, particularly recruitment, retention and staffing capacity. Low availability is frequently identified as a key issue, with concerns about how the proposals may affect staffing levels, morale and longer-term workforce resilience.

6.7.1 Staffing shortages seen as the root issue, not station viability

Respondents commonly described low availability at affected stations as a workforce challenge rather than evidence that stations are no longer required. Reduced availability was frequently linked to difficulties in recruitment and retention, rather than a lack of demand or risk within the communities served.

Some responses suggested that the proposals focus on changes to stations or infrastructure without addressing these underlying workforce issues. Others indicated that, with targeted intervention, staffing levels could improve over time and that closures may limit the opportunity to rebuild local capacity.

> *"Low availability should be treated as evidence that the on-call system needs urgent reform and investment, not as justification to remove local fire cover."*

6.7.2 Calls for stronger recruitment, retention, training and incentives

Many responses called for more active efforts to strengthen the on-call workforce. These included increased recruitment activity, improved engagement with local employers to support daytime availability, and enhanced incentives such as pay, conditions or flexibility.

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Some respondents also highlighted the importance of training and skills development, particularly for roles such as drivers or officers, suggesting that targeted investment could improve station availability. In this context, workforce-focused measures were often presented as an alternative to station closures.

> *"The problem seems to be a lack of firefighters. I have not seen a recruiting campaign in a long time. More effort and engagement needed."*

6.7.3 Perceived impact on morale and future workforce resilience

Responses also raised concerns about the potential impact of the proposals on morale, retention and future workforce capacity. On-call firefighters were often described as committed members of their communities, with concerns that closures could lead to the loss of experienced personnel or reduce motivation among those who remain.

Some respondents also suggested that removing local stations could reduce the visibility of the on-call role and make future recruitment more difficult, with potential implications for longer-term workforce sustainability.

> *"Low availability doesn't mean low risk... Rather than closing the stations, I think the service should explore ways to boost recruitment, support on-call crews better, and look at alternative models before removing these facilities completely"*

6.7.4 Practical constraints and challenges in maintaining availability

A minority of responses highlighted ongoing difficulties in recruiting and sustaining on-call crews, suggesting that some stations are consistently unable to maintain availability. In this context, some respondents indicated that the impact of changes may be more limited where availability is already low, or that resources could be used more effectively elsewhere.

> *"The three stations struggle to crew at the minute (without additional overtime costs from off duty wholetime employees) This means that the effect on the local population will be less than expected"*

6.8 Financial Considerations

Responses within this theme reflect differing views on the financial case for the proposal, particularly in relation to efficiency, value for money and the trade-offs between cost savings and service provision.

6.8.1 Perceived inefficiency of low-activity stations

Responses described the affected stations as representing poor value for money, with low incident numbers and limited availability seen as insufficient justification for ongoing costs.

> *"These stations appear to be poor value for money in terms of coverage provided."*

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6.8.2 Support for resource reallocation and efficiency

Some respondents supported redistributing funding, staffing and assets to areas where they could deliver greater operational benefit, including investment in wholetime provision or higher-demand locations.

In this context, the relatively small, reported impact on response times was seen as indicating that savings could be achieved without significantly affecting overall service delivery.

> *"If they aren't being of use and the money can be used elsewhere then I would suggest closing them and moving those resources somewhere else, or for more important stations."*

6.8.3 Concerns about cost-driven reductions in service provision

Other responses emphasised that financial savings should not be prioritised over service provision or safety. Some respondents questioned whether the scale of potential savings justified station closures, particularly where this may reduce local cover.

There were also concerns about the longer-term implications of removing infrastructure, including the cost or difficulty of reinstating stations in the future. Some responses suggested that alternative approaches, such as increased funding or targeted investment, could be considered to maintain service provision and local presence.

> *"…I understand the service needs to run like a business but closing the stations means you will never get the station back again."*

6.9 Impacts on Oxfordshire's communities

6.9.1 Loss of immediate local protection and fastest response

Respondents expressed concern that closing stations in Henley, Eynsham and Woodstock would remove immediate local fire cover for residents, leaving these areas without nearby response capability. This was framed as a direct reduction in protection, with greater risk of incidents escalating before crews arrive and potential implications for risk to life and property.

6.9.2 Disproportionate impacts on rural, edge-of-county and dependent communities

Impacts were seen by some as uneven, with rural, dispersed and edge-of-county communities, particularly in South Oxfordshire, identified as most affected.

This includes villages and hamlets within each station ground, areas reliant on constrained access routes, and locations dependent on cross-border support. These communities were described as already more exposed due to distance and limited alternative cover, with closures seen as widening inequalities in protection.

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6.9.3 Communities with higher or evolving risk profiles facing reduced protection

Many responses emphasised that affected areas are growing and changing, with increasing and more complex risk. This includes housing growth, particularly along the A40 corridor, alongside rising traffic, tourism and major events.

Environmental risks, including flooding and wildfire, were also highlighted, alongside place-specific risks such as heritage buildings, historic centres and industrial or agricultural activity. A consistent concern was that these local and evolving risks may not be fully reflected in county-wide assessments.

6.9.4 Loss of local fire stations as community assets and prevention capacity

Local fire stations were described as community assets contributing to prevention, engagement and reassurance. Their removal was seen as reducing activities such as Safe and Well visits, school engagement and community outreach, alongside the loss of visible presence.

Respondents also highlighted the loss of local knowledge held by crews, including familiarity with local risks and infrastructure. These impacts were seen as particularly affecting vulnerable groups and communities reliant on local relationships.

6.9.5 Reduced system resilience and reliability in high-demand or major incidents

Concerns also focused on system performance under pressure. Local stations were seen as providing backup capacity during concurrent incidents and supporting response to major or complex events.

Their removal was viewed as reducing system flexibility, increasing reliance on distant or already committed resources, and leading to longer or less predictable response times in high-demand scenarios. Impacts were seen as most acute in rural and already under-served areas

6.10 Suggestions to lessen the impact on Oxfordshire's communities

6.10.1 Maintain local provision and address underlying staffing challenges

The most consistent suggestion was to avoid station closures and instead address underlying workforce challenges. Respondents emphasised recruitment, retention and support for on-call firefighters as key to improving availability and maintaining local cover.

6.10.2 Strengthen staffing support, training and operational capacity

Many responses called for increased investment in workforce support mechanisms to improve availability and operational effectiveness. This included expanding training provision,

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particularly for specialist and operational roles, and strengthening functions such as Station Support Officers to improve crew readiness and bring appliances into operation more consistently.

6.10.3 Explore alternative staffing and operating models

Some respondents suggested alternative staffing and operating models to retain local provision while addressing capacity or cost pressures. These included hybrid staffing approaches, shared on-call arrangements, and more flexible models such as part-time or time-limited cover.

In some cases, retaining stations in a reduced or standby capacity was proposed to support surge demand or major incidents.

6.10.4 Phase implementation and review impacts before further changes

A number of responses emphasised the need to sequence changes carefully. Rather than implementing closures simultaneously, respondents suggested a phased approach with clear review points to assess real-world impacts on response times, resilience and community confidence before further changes are made.

6.10.5 Maintain resilience and reinvest in affected areas

Where changes are implemented, respondents emphasised the need to maintain system resilience and ensure effective alternative cover. This included demonstrating how concurrent incidents would be managed and retaining flexibility within the system until new arrangements are proven.

Some responses also highlighted the importance of transparently reinvesting any financial or staffing savings into response capacity, resilience and community safety activity, particularly in affected areas.

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7 STAKEHOLDER SUBMISSIONS TO THE CONSULTATION

7.1 Introduction

The consultation on proposals to improve Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service attracted a substantial number of direct written responses from a wide range of stakeholders. Direct submissions were received from local authorities, workforce representative organisations, neighbouring fire services, major institutions, community organisations and individual residents.

These responses share stakeholder views of the consultation proposals and wider issues in the fire and rescue service. Across the submissions there is recognition that the service faces genuine operational pressures, particularly in relation to the declining availability of on call firefighters and the difficulty of maintaining reliable daytime crew availability. Submissions were received from:

- Brize Norton Parish Council
- Cherwell District Council
- Chipping Norton Town Council
- Cllr Carl Rylett, West Oxfordshire District Council, Eynsham Parish Council
- Cllr Gareth Epps, Deddington Division, Oxfordshire County Council
- Eynsham Parish Council
- Fire Brigades Union (FBU)
- Harwell Parish Council
- Layla Moran MP Member of Parliament for Oxford West & Abingdon
- Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
- The Fire and Rescue Services Association
- The Registrar, University of Oxford
- Thrupp Canal Cruising Club (TCCC)
- University of Oxford (Division of Gardens and Libraries (GLAM) and the Bodleian Libraries)
- West Oxfordshire District Council
- Witney Town Council
- Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF)
- Woodstock Town Council
- 26 Individual Resident Responses

The detailed themes emerging from consideration of these responses is discussed below and the detailed responses are available for consideration in Appendix C of this analysis report.

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7.2 Overall Sentiment of Consultation Responses

Analysis of the consultation responses indicates that sentiment towards the proposals is predominantly negative. While respondents broadly recognise the need for the fire and rescue service to adapt to changing operational conditions, most submissions express opposition to the specific measures proposed.

Based on the responses reviewed, the distribution of views can broadly be summarised as follows:

- approximately three quarters (70-75%) of responses oppose the proposals overall.
- approximately a quarter (20-25%) express mixed or conditional views
- around 5-to-10% express support for the proposals

Even where conditional support is expressed, this is typically limited to specific elements of the proposals, such as improving daytime availability through increased wholetime staffing. The dominant message across the responses is that reform should prioritise strengthening workforce capacity rather than reducing infrastructure or operational resources.

As one individual resident respondent noted:

"I support change but not change that removes capability before fixing the system."

7.3 Recognition of the Need for Reform

A common starting point across many responses is recognition that the fire and rescue service must adapt to changing circumstances. Respondents frequently highlight the declining availability of on call firefighters during daytime hours as one of the most significant challenges facing the service.

Several stakeholders acknowledge that maintaining fire engines which cannot reliably be crewed during the day may represent an inefficient use of resources. Some respondents therefore support proposals aimed at improving daytime availability through increased wholetime staffing at selected stations.

However, respondents consistently distinguish between the principle of reform and the specific proposals under consultation. While the need for reform is widely accepted, many stakeholders question whether the measures proposed represent the most effective way to address the underlying structural issues affecting the service.

7.4 Concerns About Fire Station Closures

The most frequently cited concern relates to proposals to close several on-call fire stations (Eynsham, Woodstock and Henley). Local authorities, community organisations and residents argue that closing these stations could reduce the resilience of the fire service network and increase response times for specific communities. Woodstock Town Council, for example, stated in its consultation response that the closure of the local station would…

"…materially undermine public safety and significantly reduce the resilience of the fire and rescue system."

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Several respondents emphasise that county wide averages may obscure the impact of these changes at the local level. Individual residents and community groups note that while modelling may show limited changes to overall response time averages, the impact for particular towns could be significantly greater.

One resident submission suggested that response times in Henley could increase from approximately eight minutes to between sixteen and twenty minutes if the station were closed.

Respondents also highlight that fire stations play an important role beyond emergency response. They serve as centres for prevention activity, community engagement and local risk awareness. Several stakeholders argue that removing these facilities could weaken both operational capability and the relationship between the fire service and local communities.

7.5 Evidence Base and Response Time Modelling

Another significant theme across the consultation responses concerns the modelling used to support the proposals.

Many respondents argue that the consultation relies heavily on county wide average response times, which may not adequately reflect variations in risk at the local level. Local councils and community organisations note that averages can obscure the distribution of response times and fail to capture worst case scenarios.

Cherwell District Council, for example, argued that the consultation should provide more detailed analysis of response time distribution and community level impacts

Some respondents also highlight the absence of publicly available station level response time data within the consultation documentation. One resident submission noted that although modelling appears to use detailed operational data, the consultation materials do not present average attendance times for individual fire stations, making it difficult to evaluate the potential impact of proposed closures.

Workforce representative organisations similarly question whether modelling based on theoretical station locations adequately reflects real operational conditions. Factors such as traffic congestion, simultaneous incidents and crew availability may significantly influence actual response times (Fire Brigades Union submission).

7.6 Workforce and Operational Implications

Workforce implications represent another major theme within the consultation responses. Several stakeholders emphasise the importance of maintaining workforce stability and morale in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the service.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) submitted a detailed response expressing strong concern about the potential workforce impacts of the proposals. The union argues that the package of changes would effectively represent a reduction in fire cover through the removal of stations and appliances and increased reliance on an already stretched on call system.

The FBU stated:

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“The package amounts to a reduction in fire cover and resilience dressed as efficiency.”

The union also raised concerns about possible reductions in crewing levels, changes to duty systems and the potential impact of restructuring on firefighter safety and operational effectiveness. According to the FBU, such changes could increase operational pressure on remaining crews and create fatigue risks.

Similar concerns are echoed in responses from individual firefighters and community respondents who argue that reductions in infrastructure may make recruitment and retention more difficult at a time when the service already faces workforce challenges.

At the same time, several stakeholders acknowledge that difficulties with the on-call system are genuine and require attention.

The Fire and Rescue Services Association highlights a long-term decline in on call availability and argues that solutions should focus on improving recruitment, employer engagement and training arrangements rather than reducing the number of fire stations.

7.7 Specialist Rescue Capability

A number of stakeholders raise concerns regarding proposals affecting specialist rescue capability currently based at Kidlington.

Several organisations argue that removing or redistributing this capability could reduce the service’s ability to respond effectively to complex incidents such as serious road traffic collisions, water rescues and technical rescues.

Community organisations associated with waterways and flood risk management highlight the importance of maintaining specialist rescue capability in a county with extensive rivers and canals. These organisations argue that climate change may increase the likelihood of flooding events, potentially increasing demand for water rescue services in the future (Inland Waterway organisations consultation responses).

7.8 Impact on Oxford City

Major institutions based in Oxford city also raise concerns about the potential relocation of fire service resources away from the city centre.

The University of Oxford notes that the city contains the highest concentration of fire incidents in the county, as well as a significant number of historic buildings and research facilities with complex fire risks. The university argues that reducing resources in this area could increase response times in locations with both the highest incident demand and the greatest concentration of heritage assets.

The university also cites a recent fire incident at Mansfield College in which rapid intervention by the fire service prevented significant damage to a historic library building, illustrating the importance of maintaining nearby fire cover.

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7.9 Cross Border and Regional Implications

Responses from neighbouring fire services highlight the importance of considering the wider regional impact of the proposals.

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority notes that its crews already attend a substantial proportion of incidents in areas of Oxfordshire close to the county border. According to the authority, approximately 66.4% of incidents in the Henley station area already involve Royal Berkshire appliances.

The authority warns that closing Henley fire station could increase cross border deployments and place additional operational pressure on neighbouring stations.

7.10 Strategic Context and Future Risk

Several respondents place the proposals within a wider strategic context, highlighting factors that may increase demand for fire and rescue services in the future.

These factors include population growth, housing development, the expansion of science and technology facilities in Oxfordshire and the increasing impact of climate change. Stakeholders highlight the growing risk of flooding, storms and wildfires and argue that these trends may increase the need for distributed emergency response capacity.

7.11 Procedural Fairness Issues

The FBU submission raises several specific procedural fairness concerns related to compliance with the Gunning principles, as upheld by the UK Supreme Court in R (Moseley) v Haringey. In this regard, several issues are raised that are distinct from the merits and safety considerations discussed elsewhere in this section, specifically:

- The consultation was not genuinely at a formative stage (because the organisational "direction of travel" was already fixed and communicated),
- Consultees were not given sufficient reasons / adequate information to respond intelligently (because critical modelling assumptions and options logic were not transparently explained in user-accessible terms),
- Practical time and capacity constraints (including holiday periods and the cognitive load of technical packs) reduced meaningful participation, and
- aspects of internal communications risked chilling workforce participation (undermining inclusiveness and equality-sensitive engagement).

There is also commentary provided on the extent to which the distributional trade-offs acknowledged in the EqIA provided for fair consideration of the council's obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty .

7.12 Summary

Overall, the consultation responses expose a fundamental tension between the objective of modernising Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and the risk of diminishing operational resilience through the removal of capacity. While there is broad recognition that the service faces serious structural challenges, particularly in relation to the availability of on-call

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firefighters, stakeholders consistently warn that the proposed restructuring risks weakening the very foundations on which public safety depends.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU), as the statutory professional body representing operational firefighters, articulates this concern most clearly. The union's submission presents the proposals not as a balanced reform programme, but as a package that removes stations, appliances, and staffing headroom without first resolving the workforce pressures that undermine service reliability. In doing so, the FBU frames the proposals as a tangible reduction in fire cover rather than a reconfiguration of resources.

Importantly, the FBU's position is not limited to industrial or workforce interests but is presented as a professional assessment of operational risk. The union warns that reducing infrastructure and staffing margins increases the likelihood of appliance unavailability, delayed response at critical incidents, and heightened fatigue and safety risks for firefighters. From this perspective, the reliance on average response times and theoretical modelling is seen as insufficient to demonstrate that public safety can be maintained under real-world conditions, particularly during periods of concurrent or high-risk incidents.

This professional warning is reinforced by local authorities, major institutions, neighbouring fire services, and community organisations, many of whom express concern that the proposals place disproportionate emphasis on efficiency while underestimating the importance of resilience, local knowledge, and surge capacity. Across the responses, there is a consistent message that the loss of stations, appliances, or specialist capability may be irreversible and could compound existing workforce recruitment and retention challenges.

Consultation responses highlight risks in proposed changes and urge a cautious approach. Stakeholders, especially the FBU, recommend prioritising workforce capability and duty system stability before reducing operational infrastructure. There is agreement that adaptation is necessary but stressing that it should not compromise firefighter safety, resilience, or public trust. Overall, the tone of submissions suggest decision-makers carefully assess proposals as professional risk reviews to ensure public safety and service sustainability.

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8 Conclusion

This consultation provides a clear and consistent evidence base on public and stakeholder views of the proposed changes to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. Across all proposals, responses were predominantly negative, with a high proportion of respondents expressing strong concern about potential impacts on service delivery.

While there is recognition among some respondents of the need to reform the service and improve alignment between resources and demand, support for the proposals is typically conditional. This conditionality is consistently linked to the ability of the proposals to maintain effective local coverage, deliver reliable response times, and ensure sufficient operational capacity and resilience under real-world conditions.

A central finding across the consultation is the importance of perceived safety and service reliability in shaping public confidence. Concerns are frequently grounded in how the proposals are expected to operate in practice, particularly in relation to local availability of resources, response performance during periods of high demand, and the sustainability of the proposed workforce model.

Confidence in the proposals is also closely linked to the strength and clarity of the supporting evidence. Respondents frequently call for greater transparency, more realistic modelling, and clearer articulation of how risks will be managed, particularly where proposals involve changes to local provision or service configuration.

Overall, the findings indicate that while there is openness to change in principle, confidence in the proposals is dependent on clear and demonstrable assurance that service effectiveness, safety and reliability will be maintained.

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Appendix A: Full Demographic Tables

This appendix provides the full demographic breakdown of consultation respondents (N=1230). Percentages are based on total submissions unless otherwise stated.

Respondent Type

Base: All respondents (N=1230)

Respondent Type	Count	%
An Oxfordshire resident	1031	83.8%
A member of the public living outside of Oxfordshire	40	3.3%
A business	26	2.1%
A representative of a group or organisation	31	2.5%
An employee of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service on a wholetime duty system	83	6.7%
An employee of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service on the on-call duty system	62	5.0%
A non-operational employee of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	19	1.5%
A former employee of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	46	3.7%
A friend or family member of a currently employed or former employee of Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	72	5.9%
A current or former employee of a fire and rescue service other than Oxfordshire	16	1.3%
A parish, town, district, or county councillor	52	4.2%
Other (please specify)	14	1.1%

Age

Base: All respondents (N=1230)

Category	Count	%
Under 16	1	0.1%
16 - 24	21	1.7%
25 - 34	90	7.3%

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Category	Count	%
35 - 44	172	14.0%
45 - 54	231	18.8%
55 - 64	251	20.4%
65 – 74	200	16.3%
75 - 84	130	10.6%
85 or over	16	1.3%
Prefer not to say	93	7.6%
Skipped	25	2.0%

Sex

Base: All respondents (N=1230)

Category	Count	%
Female	502	40.8%
Male	542	44.1%
Prefer not to say	145	11.8%
I use another term (please state here)	6	0.5%
Skipped	35	2.8%

Ethnic Group or Background

Base: All respondents (N=1230)

Category	Count	%
Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or any other Asian background)	13	1.1%
Black or Black British (Caribbean, African, or any other Black background)	3	0.2%
Chinese	4	0.3%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White, and Asian, and any other mixed background)	14	1.1%

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Category	Count	%
White (British, Irish, or any other white background)	970	78.9%
Prefer not to say	187	15.2%
Other ethnic group or background (please specify)	6	0.5%
Skipped	33	2.7%

Disability or Long-Term Health Condition (Q33)

Base: All respondents (N=1230)

Category	Count	%
Yes - a lot	45	3.7%
Yes – a little	113	9.2%
No	880	71.5%
Prefer not to say	154	12.5%
Skipped	38	3.1%

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Appendix B: Impact Assessment FBU Campaign

Introduction

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) produced and distributed a briefing as a structured campaign guide designed to guide responses to the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service consultation. It provided clear instructions on how to complete the survey, including recommending specific answer choices (such as “strongly disagree” or “very negative”) and offering suggested wording for open text responses. While it encourages respondents to use their own words, it also supplies key phrases and arguments to include, focusing on opposition to proposed changes.

The document is a comprehensive campaign document which consistently promotes a set of core positions, including opposing fire engine reductions, station closures, reduced night time cover, and the introduction of 12-hour shifts. It frames the proposals as increasing risk, particularly through slower response times and impacts on vulnerable communities, and calls for alternatives such as increased investment, maintaining existing resources, and further consultation.

Overall, the briefing acts as a coordinated messaging tool to support a campaign against the proposed changes and to guide respondents toward a consistent, negative response across the consultation.

Assessment Methodology

In recognition of the effectiveness of the FBU’s campaign we undertook a separate analysis to attempt to quantify the

The analysis used a structured approach to identify patterns of coordinated responses within the consultation data. All open text answers were cleaned and standardised, then analysed to detect exact duplicates and high levels of similarity between responses. Responses were compared using text similarity techniques and grouped where wording was very close, allowing identification of clusters of responses that appeared to follow shared templates or guidance. Timing of submissions was also considered, with responses compared before and after the campaign launch date.

To estimate campaign influence:

- Responses were classified based on how closely they matched others and whether they formed part of large, highly similar clusters submitted after the campaign began.
- The most conservative estimate focused only on tightly grouped responses with strong textual similarity and clear alignment with campaign messaging.
- Broader indicators included responses that were less similar but still showed signs of shared wording.

This approach provides a consistent way to measure visible templating, while recognising that more subtle forms of influence cannot be directly detected.

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Summary of FBU Campaign Influence

Overall pattern of responses

The consultation received 1,230 responses, with a very large majority (94%) submitted after 3 November 2025, the approximate launch date of the FBU campaign. This clear surge strongly suggests mobilisation activity, but timing alone is not sufficient to identify the source of that mobilisation.

What can be quantified with confidence

A small proportion shows clear template use: Analysis identifies a small but measurable group of responses that closely match campaign wording:

- Around 2 to 3 percent of responses show strong evidence of being directly based on campaign templates
- A slightly larger group (around 4 to 6 percent) shows copy and paste or lightly edited similarities

These responses:

- Use very similar or identical phrasing
- Appear almost entirely after the campaign start date
- Closely match language from the FBU briefing document

Conclusion: There is clear, quantifiable evidence of some template driven responses, but this group is relatively small.

Strong alignment with campaign messaging

Across the dataset:

- Certain phrases and arguments closely match FBU campaign materials
- Responses using these patterns cluster around specific consultation questions
- Recommended answer options (for example strong disagreement or negative impacts) become much more common after the campaign began

Conclusion: There is strong evidence of influence on how people responded, even where wording is not identical.

What cannot be reliably quantified

Total campaign reach

It is not possible to measure how many responses were influenced by the campaign overall. This is because:

- Many respondents may have used their own words, even if influenced
- The dataset does not include source or referral information (for example how people heard about the consultation)
- There are no identifiers such as IP address or campaign tracking data

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Implication: The measured figures (2 to 6 percent) represent only the visible “template” portion, not the full impact.

Attribution of the response surge

Although the timing shows a large increase in responses after early November, it cannot be proven that:

- All or most of this increase is due to the FBU campaign
- Other factors (media coverage, community networks, general awareness) did not also contribute

Implication: The campaign is likely a major driver, but this cannot be isolated with certainty.

Distinguishing influence from shared opinion

Even where responses are similar:

- People may independently express the same concerns or views
- Similar language may come from shared public narratives, not direct copying

Implication: Some similarity may reflect genuine consensus rather than coordinated messaging.

Summary

- There is clear evidence of campaign activity influencing responses, particularly through templated or closely aligned wording
- However, this influence is only partially measurable
- The quantified figures represent a lower bound, capturing only the most obvious cases
- The true scale of influence is likely higher, but cannot be precisely measured with the available data

Conclusions

- Quantifiable influence: small but clear (around 2 to 6 percent)
- Unquantifiable influence: likely much larger but cannot be measured directly
- Overall conclusion: the campaign clearly shaped participation and messaging, but its full impact cannot be precisely determined

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Appendix C: Stakeholder Written Submissions

Businesses, public body or organisation responses

Richard Ovenden OBE, MA, FRSA, FSA, FRHistS, FRSE, HonFRSL, HonFBA

Bodley's Librarian & the Helen Hamlyn Director of the University Libraries

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BODLEIAN LIBRARIES
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

31 January 2026

To whom it may concern,

Response to the proposals to close Rewley Road Fire Station and relocate the service to a new location north of Oxford.

I would like to formally express concerns on behalf of the both the Division of Gardens Libraries and Museums (GLAM) at the University of Oxford, and the Bodleian Libraries (I lead both the Bodleian and GLAM)

The reasons for expressing these concerns for both the Bodleian and for GLAM are essentially the same. The risk from fire to life safety is of paramount concern for both GLAM and the Bodleian, and the risk to the historic collections (many of them held on behalf of the nation) and to the historic buildings in the centre of Oxford in which collections, staff, students, researchers and visitors come together are profound risks which we feel are well mitigated by the presence of the Fire Station in its current Rewley Road location, and which we regard the move away from as being of major concern.

Allow me to arrange my concerns under there headings:

1. **People**

The presence of the Fire Service so close to the centre of Oxford has been of great benefit to GLAM and to the Bodleian for many years. I have been in senior management at the Bodleian (the Director for the last 12 years) and the Fire Service has responded with astonishing speed. Although there have been no serious incidents in that time, the alarms that have occasionally been triggered have been real, and the speed of response has given myself and the Directors of the Museums (in particular) comfort that the lives of people working, studying, or visiting our institutions would be protected. The Bodleian has on a typical day between 7-9,000 students and researchers using its reading rooms. Across GLAM a typical day will see over 10k members of the public visiting our public sites.

2. **Buildings**

Many of the GLAM buildings, and many of the Bodleian buildings are of the highest level of architectural and cultural significance. There are numerous Grade 1 Listed Buildings, including the Radcliffe Camera, the Old Bodleian Library, and the Divinity School which are some of the most significant buildings in the city, and together with the Sheldonian Theatre, the University Church, and the older colleges surrounding Radcliffe Square form a group of historic structures of outstanding importance culturally, and a great attraction to visitors to come to the city either for academic reasons or for tourism). The protection and preservation of these buildings is of grave concern to the GLAM, the Bodleian and to the University. Many of these buildings are ancient, and have inherent structural issues which make them hard to provide the most modern fire protection.

Continued....

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3. Collections

GLAM institutions hold collections of immense global cultural and historic significance. The most important of these are physically held in the buildings of the GLAM institutions in central Oxford: ranging from ancient Papyri to medieval manuscripts and renaissance drawings (by Raphael and Michelangelo) to copies of Magna Carta, the Gutenberg Bible and the first folio of Shakespeare, the papers of seven Prime Ministers and of writers such as JRR Tolkien and John le Carré, many of these materials are preserved in the Oxford GLAM institutions on behalf of the nation, through explicit allocation decisions made by government, having been designated as being of pre-eminent significance for the cultural heritage of Britain.

Your colleagues operate at the very highest level of their profession, and are held in high esteem by all within GLAM. They have formed close and strong working relationships and are familiar with the buildings and the intricacies and peculiarities of them. They have responded to fire alarms, flooding and other challenges with the speed and effectiveness consistent with the highest levels of the UK fire service. The current proximity to the key buildings must be a critical factor in enabling not only swift responses but also such close connections between individuals that this proximity has afforded allows your colleagues to know and understand vital site-specific issues connected to these buildings.

My colleagues, the Directors of other GLAM sites, are also responding to your consultation, but on behalf of the GLAM group, and the Bodleian Libraries in particular, I welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues in person, and to consider in detail the issues which we feel are of critical concern arising from your plans. Emergency response times are a major concern, but so too are the deep and sustained knowledge of local sights and site-specific conditions, and the risks associated with the collections and buildings of national and international pre-eminence.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Ovenden

Richard Ovenden
Bodley's Librarian & the Helen Hamlyn Director of the University Libraries

Response from Layla Moran MP Member of Parliament for Oxford West & Abingdon 29th January 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the county-wide consultation on the future arrangements for Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service. I welcome the Council's proactive review to ensure that resources are aligned with local needs, particularly following the difficulties in recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters and the resulting daytime availability challenges. We must also recognise that the demands on the Fire and Rescue Service have changed over the years.

I fully support strengthening fire prevention and protection across all communities. Effective outreach, education in schools, fire safety inspections, and locally tailored campaigns should remain central pillars of fire prevention and safety awareness. Any resource reallocation must safeguard these vital services.

I want to thank Oxfordshire Country Council for listening to feedback and extending the deadline for response to the consultation to the 31st January.

Constituents have raised a number of concerns with me including:

- The quality of this consultation. Constituents have commented that the survey is poorly drafted

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- The protection of Oxford City Centre's heritage assets and the impact of the proposed changes to the speed of response to this area – this is particularly highlighted by the recent fire at Mansfield College where the swift response from the Fire Service saved the building from more significant and widespread damage
- The potential impact on nighttime speed of response to residents in Botley and the surrounding villages should cover be reduced
- The proposal to reduce crew numbers on engines
- The potential loss of Kidlington's Rescue Tender and the lack of any proposal as to how the specialist rescue service would operate in the future. This has raised concerns that this important part of the proposals has not been consulted on
- A view that these proposals are being put forward to cut costs

I welcome the Council's commitment to consultation and transparency. I encourage continued engagement with residents, staff, and representative bodies to ensure that final decisions balance operational efficiency with community confidence.
Thank you again for your work on this important matter. I look forward to reviewing the outcomes of the consultation and the next steps.

Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF)

Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF) represents all residents of a large area at the northern end of Oxford city, stretching across from the River Thames to Cutteslowe Park – it is the former Oxford City Wolvercote Ward. Its status rests on the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan, which is a plan for the area approved overwhelmingly by local referendum in May 2021, and finally made by Oxford City Council.

Comments in response to Oxfordshire County Council's consultation on changes to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

The WNF Steering Committee has considered the documents provided by OFRS, and offers the following comments on the proposals for changes to the fire and rescue service, on behalf of the Forum. There are features we agree with, but we also have concerns.
1. One proposed change, in particular, would affect our Wolvercote Neighbourhood forum area: the move from having fire stations at Rewley Rd and in Kidlington to forming a joint fire station 'toward the north of Oxford'. More detail has not been provided, but in view of the lack of space elsewhere, we assume this means within the WNF area, at Oxford North or nearby at Peartree. Both would provide easy access to main roads A40, A44 and A34, and thereby avoid congestion within Oxford city, unless attending an incident within the city. We recognise there would be some noise nuisance from fire engines' sirens when they are on call at night, but these roads are already blighted by frequent sirens from ambulances, so we expect our residents living near these roads not to be unduly worse affected. At the same time, all parts of our area would benefit

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from faster responses from fire engines when needed, and obviously we welcome that. 2. Our WNF area contains two waterways, the river Thames and the Oxford canal, with a third (river Cherwell) along its perimeter. Therefore we are most concerned by the lack of assurance in the proposals that there will continue to be adequate resources for rescue from water. The proposals include removal of the specialist rescue vehicle currently based in Kidlington, but with only a vague promise to 'review how we deliver specialist rescue services using other fire engines'. In our view, rescue from water is such a critical necessity not only for our area and Oxford City generally, but for the whole county, that the proposals should have included a concrete plan for how this facility will be retained. 3. At present, large parts of Oxfordshire are clearly less well served than they could be, because so many fire stations are overly dependent on on-call firefighters during the day, when there is a severe shortage of these in some places. It is wasteful of resources to maintain fire engines that are vulnerable to being unable to be crewed during daytime, because of a shortage of on-call firefighters. For this reason we support the proposal to change the five fire stations spread widely across Oxfordshire at Wallingford (or Crowmarsh), Bicester, Chipping Norton,

Witney and Faringdon to full-time crews during daytime.

Similarly, we understand the proposal to close fire stations at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock, which find it difficult to recruit daytime on-call firefighters, but are sufficiently close to other fire stations that their locality, with the other changes being proposed, would actually see an improvement in provision, according to the Response Time maps provided. In fact, we are pleased to see these maps show the changes proposed would cause improvement (i.e. reduction) of response times across almost the entirety of Oxfordshire. 5. The Response Time maps show clearly that the area predicted to suffer worst in the entire county, with the largest increase in response times, is to the south-east of Oxford city centre, in the vicinity of Cowley Road: a densely populated part of Oxford. We find this both concerning and surprising, because it is in the area of the city currently served by Slade Park fire station (according to Figure 2 of the report), which is not proposed to change. It is unsatisfactory that the report fails to explain this consequence of the proposals, and how it will be mitigated. 6. It is very clear from press coverage of the proposals and the response of many firefighters, including the national FBU, that the proposals have not been developed in engagement with, and with support from, many OFRS employees. Another weakness of the report is that it does not explain in any detail the expected impact on staff of the service, in terms of numbers of redundancies and needs to move home etc. There are only vague references to this such as 'some firefighters could face redundancy'. In our view, this is disrespectful of OFRS towards its employees. For Oxfordshire residents reading the report, an important factor in reviewing the proposals will naturally be their expected impact on wellbeing of firefighters themselves, but this seems not to have been considered. In our opinion, the proposals should be revised, to correct the defects

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identified in paragraphs 2, 5 and 6 above.

University of Oxford

Subject: Response to the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Consultation I am writing on behalf of the University of Oxford in response to the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS) consultation on proposed changes to fire cover across the county. We have separately submitted an electronic response to the consultation.
The University recognises the scale and complexity of the challenges facing OFRS, including recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters and the need to ensure long-term sustainability of the service. We acknowledge the stated ambition to improve response times across Oxfordshire as a whole; however, having carefully reviewed the consultation document, supporting evidence, and the Final Modelling Report, the University opposes a number of the proposals, particularly where they relate to Oxford city.

Impact on Oxford City and the University Estate The modelling data demonstrates that Oxford city already experiences the highest concentration of incidents by area. It is also the most densely populated part of the county and contains the greatest concentration of listed buildings, heritage assets, museums, and higher-risk laboratory buildings, notably within the Science Area. Despite this, the proposals would reduce the number of fire engines in the city centre and relocate the remaining city resource to a site in North Oxford. The Response Time Maps show that this would result in a significant increase in response times to the very areas where risk is highest. In some cases, response times to central Oxford locations may double in comparison to current attendance times, materially increasing risk to life, irreplaceable heritage assets, and internationally significant research activity. As custodians of many of Oxford's most iconic buildings, we cannot support proposals that would knowingly extend response times to incidents occurring on our estate.

Resources, Risk, and Community Safety

The consultation sets out three key principles, including matching resources to risk and improving community safety. Based on the data provided, the University does not believe these principles are met in respect of Oxford city.

Reducing resources in the area with the highest incident demand, highest population density, and greatest concentration of vulnerable buildings is inconsistent with a risk-based approach. The proposals would significantly diminish the prevention and protection activity that currently underpins community safety in Oxford.

The University currently benefits from strong, well-established working relationships with the crews based at Rewley Road and The Slade. These crews play a vital role in site-specific risk information, fire safety advice, and joint training exercises across our estate. Under the proposed model, fewer firefighters would be available to undertake this work, with remaining crews expected to cover a much wider geographical area following the proposed closure of several on-call stations. This would inevitably reduce

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engagement, undermine prevention activity, and weaken community safety outcomes in the city.

Alternative Opportunities

The University is concerned that insufficient attention has been given to call-handling times. The consultation data shows average call-handling times in excess of one minute and thirty seconds, a significant increase since the introduction of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service. Addressing this element of the response chain offers a clear opportunity to reduce overall response times without withdrawing resources from high-risk areas such as Oxford city.

Similarly, the University asks for further to improve on-call firefighter recruitment and retention. Recent changes to on-call pay arrangements, expected housing growth across the county, and the absence of a dedicated professional recruitment function suggest that alternative options have not yet been fully explored. We strongly encourage further investment in this area before irreversible decisions on station closures and resource withdrawal are made.

Conclusion

The University holds particularly strong concerns about:

- the relocation of the city fire station from Rewley Road to North Oxford;
- the reduction of wholetime fire engines in the city centre;
- the proposed closure of Kidlington, Woodstock, and Eynsham fire stations where this directly enables the removal of city resources; and
- the disbandment of the specialist rescue capability currently based at Kidlington.

While we recognise that some proposals elsewhere in the county may deliver local benefits, the cumulative effect of these changes would be a significant reduction in resilience, response capability, and firefighter safety in Oxford city.

The University of Oxford does not support proposals that would increase response times to the city centre, reduce prevention and protection activity, and withdraw resources from the area of highest risk in order to achieve marginal improvements elsewhere in the county. We believe there are credible alternative approaches that should be fully explored, including improvements to call handling, investment in on-call recruitment, and consideration of alternative city-centre station locations that could deliver savings without compromising public safety.

We would welcome further engagement with the Council and OFRS to explore these options constructively.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Aitken CB
The Registrar
University of Oxford

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Thrupp Canal Cruising Club.

Dear Sir.

Please accept the following response from Thrupp Canal Cruising Club (TCCC) to your consultation document on the Fire and Rescue Service Re-organisation.

TCCC confines its comments to the proposal to take out of service the specialist Rescue Vehicle currently based in Kidlington. We have strong reservations about removing this highly skilled service from Oxfordshire, particularly as concerns their water rescue role. With so many waterways and bodies of water within the county, some used for boating, such as the Oxford Canal, River Thames, Farmoor Reservoir, and rivers used for fishing and swimming, it seems to us that downgrading this service will ultimately result in tragedy. This is an increasing likelihood given the significant rise in flooding events we are now experiencing as a result of higher winter rainfall and associated flooding. TCCC therefore opposes this one aspect of the proposed Service Reform and would urge the Fire and Rescue Service to relocate the specialist vehicle to an appropriate central fire station rather than dispense with it altogether.

Yours faithfully,

Geoff Branner

Secretary, Thrupp Canal Cruising Club.

Woodstock Town Council

This paper is submitted by Woodstock Town Council to support that motion and is the Council's response to the consultation on proposals to improve Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS). We recognise the need to modernise services, improve prevention, support the workforce and ensure value for money. However, we believe it will not improve services to the towns and rural areas to the north and west of Oxford and **we are strongly opposed to proposals that would reduce local emergency cover through station closures, appliance reductions or crewing changes**.

In particular, **we oppose the proposed closures of the on-call fire stations at Woodstock and Eynsham, and we oppose any potential future closure or downgrading of Kidlington Fire Station.** Public safety must come first. We also oppose the closure of Henley Fire station, as suggested in the proposal.

1. Executive Summary

We oppose the proposed closures of Woodstock and Eynsham fire stations. We also oppose any potential closure or downgrading of Kidlington Fire Station.
We believe that:
County-wide **average response-time figures do not reflect local reality**; station closures will **increase risk for specific communities**.
Rural and 'urban fringe' areas will be disproportionately harmed by centralisation due to distance, road constraints, flooding and limited alternative cover. Climate

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change (storms, floods, wildfires, heatwaves) and rapid housing growth mean Oxfordshire needs stronger local response capacity, not less.
Recruitment and retention challenges in on-call services should be tackled through targeted investment, training and employer engagement—not by closing stations. **We request publication of transparent, locality-level modelling, including 'worst-case' and 'peak demand' scenarios, and an open and inclusive debate about what could be done to improve services with contributions from all sides, (including the FBU and ordinary firefighters) before any decisions are made**.

Our Core Objection: Closures Reduce Resilience and Increase Risk

It shouldn't need stating that fire and rescue incidents are time critical. Small changes to 'average' response times can mask substantial changes in the distribution of response times for particular places and at particular times of day (e.g., peak traffic, major events, severe weather, simultaneous Woodstock Town Council Response 19/01/2026 pg. 2 incidents). Removing a local station reduces system resilience: when neighbouring stations are already committed, fallback cover comes from further away, compounding delays. **Concerns with Response-Time Modelling and Evidence Base**

The Council is concerned that headline claims about minimal county-wide impact can obscure the local impact on individual towns, villages and road corridors. Concerns have also been raised about reliance on modelling based on theoretical station locations. Operational experience suggests that real-world response times, availability of fully trained crews and access to specialist equipment are not adequately captured by county-wide averages. Decisions should therefore be informed by local operational evidence as well as modelling outputs. Woodstock Town Council asks for the following to be published (or clearly summarised) for each affected locality before a final decision is taken:

- Predicted response times at community level (not just county averages), including distribution (median, 90th percentile) and worst-case scenarios.
- Separate analysis for different incident types (dwelling fires, RTCs, flooding/water rescue, wildfire/grassfire, hazardous materials).
- Scenarios that reflect peak traffic, road closures, major events, flooding events and simultaneous incidents.
- How cover will be assured when neighbouring stations are already mobilised.
- Equalities and rural-impact assessment: which communities face the greatest increase in risk.

4.Station-by-Station Impacts

The following sections set out why **the proposed closures of Woodstock and Eynsham fire stations and any potential future closure or downgrading or closure of Kidlington fire station are unacceptable.**

4.1 Woodstock Fire Station – Proposed Closure (Opposed)

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Woodstock sits at the intersection of market-town, rural and visitor economy risks. The area includes major visitor flows (especially when there are major events), heritage assets and surrounding villages. Closure would increase reliance on more distant stations and reduce local resilience, particularly during peak tourism, major events and severe weather. Woodstock Fire Station is a community fire station, recruiting staff locally and working in close collaboration with the Thames Valley Police's Woodstock Neighbourhood Policing Team on local issues such as dangerous parking.

- **Population in Woodstock and local villages is growing rapidly as more and more houses are built necessitating local service expansion rather than a reduction in local assets and staffing.**
- Woodstock's visitor economy and seasonal peaks require resilient local emergency cover.
- **Surrounding villages could experience longer response times if Woodstock Fire Station is closed.**
- **Road network constraints and congestion (especially major events at Blenheim Palace) can significantly affect mobilisation from more distant stations.**
- **Local crews provide valuable local knowledge and risk intelligence for heritage/visitor sites and rural properties**.

4.2 Eynsham Fire Station – Proposed Closure (Opposed)

Eynsham is a key service point for the north and western Oxford fringe and surrounding villages. It sits amid significant housing growth pressures (including the planned salt cross village), constrained Woodstock Town Council Response 19/01/2026 pg. 3

road links, and increasing flood and surface-water risk. Removing Eynsham's local capability would lengthen response times and reduce resilience when Oxford and Witney resources are committed.

- **Eynsham provides vital first response for a large population and surrounding villages, with very significant growth in households and businesses in the pipeline.**
- **Eynsham houses an ISU (Incident Support Unit) which carries specialized equipment like spare breathing apparatus (BA) cylinders, flooding response equipment, boarding materials, lighting, and a "snake eye" camera for incident support beyond their standard engine. The ISU is deployed to major incidents to provide extra resources and capabilities, including support for other crews. The closure of Eynsham Fire Station would mean that this time critical incident support equipment would be centralized resulting in delays in its deployment to more rural areas that lie to the north and west of Oxford City.**
- **Road congestion and highly constrained crossing points can materially delay appliances especially when they are coming from further afield.**

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- **Increased flooding events and extreme weather are raising, and will continue to raise, demand for rescue and safety services.**
- **Closure of local fire stations and reductions in staffing levels would reduce local prevention and community engagement capacity (home and business safety visits, youth engagement, local risk intelligence).**

4.3 Kidlington Fire Station – Possible Closure/Downgrading (Opposed)

Kidlington Fire Station provides both local response and county-wide resilience. It serves a large and rapidly growing population, surrounding villages and major transport corridors, while supporting wider system resilience when Oxford-based resources are unavailable.

The station hosts a specialist rescue tender delivering a unique county-wide capability not replicated elsewhere in Oxfordshire. This combines specialist equipment with crews trained for complex and technically demanding rescues, including serious road traffic collisions and flooding incidents. Removal of this asset would represent a net loss of resilience rather than an improvement.

Operational experience demonstrates that retaining co-located specialist equipment and trained crews improves outcomes by ensuring that the right resources arrive together. Dispersing specialist capability across multiple appliances risks fragmentation and delay during complex incidents.

Staffing considerations strengthen this case. Proposed shift changes and the loss of tied accommodation for on-call firefighters associated with Kidlington would likely reduce night-time availability, increase response times and compound risks identified elsewhere in this response. Direct engagement with firefighters indicates that proposed changes to shift patterns and crewing levels risk reducing on-call availability, particularly at night. The introduction of extended shifts may prevent some full-time firefighters from continuing on-call duties due to working-time regulations, further weakening cover during critical periods.

Concerns have also been raised about reliance on modelling based on theoretical station locations. Operational experience suggests that real-world response times, availability of trained crews and access to specialist equipment are not adequately captured by county-wide averages. Decisions should therefore be informed by local operational evidence as well as modelling outputs. Woodstock Town Council Response 19/01/2026 pg. 4

5. On-call Firefighters: Solve the Staffing Problem—Don't Close Stations

The Council recognises the challenges with on-call availability and recruitment. However, closing fire stations and reducing staffing does not resolve the underlying causes of service pressure. It simply moves the risk elsewhere—onto neighbouring stations, onto already stretched crews, and ultimately onto residents who potentially face longer response times and reduced protection in emergencies. Instead, the

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Council ask OFRS and Oxfordshire County Council to develop and adopt a properly funded targeted on-call strengthening plan.

At this point in time, both Woodstock and Eynsham fire stations each have more than a dozen on-call fire-fighters. The shortages are not of staff, but of fully trained staff, with specific competencies. Before a fire engine can be deployed there must be a minimum of four crew members on board. Furthermore the crew of four must include a qualified driver and a Crew Commander (or higher) to lead the response, plus at least two of the firefighters must be trained in wearing breathing apparatus. Although there appears to be sufficient on-call fire-fighters at both Eynsham and Woodstock, deployment is often delayed due to lack of fire-fighters that are trained in the required competencies. The Council understands that this is due to insufficient training resources and funding.

Woodstock Town Council suggests that staffing issues should be addressed by:

- **Improved employer engagement: agreements with local employers to support on-call availability (including public sector bodies and major employers).**
- Fair and competitive remuneration and retention incentives.
- **Greater flexibility in duty systems, training, scheduling and standby arrangements.**
- **Increased funding for, and availability of, training in critical competencies.**
- **Local recruitment campaigns and pathways (including retained-to-fulltime progression).**
- Investment in stations as community hubs for prevention and recruitment.
- **Investment in on-call fire stations should be understood not merely as an operational expense, but as an investment in community capacity.**

Strengthening stations as local community hubs for prevention, training and recruitment helps address staffing challenges while reinforcing the social fabric that underpins successful on-call models.

Closing stations risks losing critical expertise and experience; permanently severing local ties, and making future recruitment harder rather than easier.

6. Climate Change, Growth and Future Risk Demand More Capacity, Not Less

Oxfordshire faces increasing climate-related incidents (storms, flooding, wildfires/grassfires, heat-related fires) alongside continued rapid housing growth and infrastructure strain. Fire and rescue is one of the cornerstones of community resilience. Reducing local presence, at this point in time, will increase vulnerability and the need for longer shifts which in turn will inevitably result in later emergency response and recovery.

This resilience requirement is further heightened by the proliferation of science parks, business parks and advanced research facilities across Oxfordshire, which introduce complex safety challenges including high fire loads, specialist laboratories, and potential biological or chemical hazards, all of which demand a well-resourced, locally

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available fire and rescue service with appropriate training, equipment and rapid response capability. Woodstock Town Council Response 19/01/2026 pg. 5

7. Alternatives to Closure: A Safer Improvement Plan

We support service improvement, but propose alternatives that maintain local safety:

- Retain stations while rebalancing cover through targeted crewing improvements and recruitment and support.
- An expanded training programme to ensure that sufficient numbers of fire-fighters with critical competencies are available to all local fire stations.
- Create cross-station 'support pools' for peak periods rather than removing stations entirely.
- Enhance prevention and risk reduction (home safety, business engagement, storm and wildfire preparedness, flood planning).
- Invest in data transparency and local accountability, including regular published performance dashboards by area.
- Work with communities on station modernisation and shared facilities where appropriate, without loss of operational cover.

8. The Community-Building Value of Local Fire Stations – Especially On-Call and Volunteer-Based Services

Local fire stations, particularly those operating on an on-call or volunteer model, are far more than emergency response assets. They are deeply embedded community institutions that generate social capital, trust, skills and civic engagement in ways that cannot be replicated by centralised or distant services.

On-call fire stations draw their crews directly from the communities they serve. Firefighters are local residents, neighbours, parents, employees of local businesses and participants in local civic life. This creates a unique two-way relationship: communities trust their fire service because it is *of* the community, and firefighters have deep local knowledge, commitment and accountability that strengthens operational effectiveness.

Volunteer-based and on-call stations:

- Act as visible symbols of collective responsibility and mutual aid, reinforcing community cohesion.
- Provide local role models, particularly for young people, encouraging public service, teamwork and skills development.
- Support local prevention work, including home and business safety visits, school engagement, event safety planning and risk awareness.
- Serve as community hubs, supporting recruitment, training, resilience planning and partnership working with the police, town and parish councils, voluntary groups, charities and local community organisations.

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- Strengthen day-to-day resilience, not just during major incidents but through continuous local presence and engagement.

The loss of a local fire station therefore represents not just a reduction in response capability, but the erosion of a vital layer of community infrastructure. Once dismantled, this social capital is extremely difficult — and often impossible — to rebuild.

9. Additional Consideration: Civil Defence and Strategic Resilience

In addition to the core arguments above, it is important to recognise the role of the Fire and Rescue Service as part of the UK's wider civil defence and emergency resilience framework. In the Woodstock Town Council Response 19/01/2026 pg. 6 unthinkable but plausible scenarios of a major terrorist incident, hostile attack, or prolonged national emergency, firefighters are central to life-saving response, building safety, hazardous materials management, evacuation support and multi-agency coordination alongside police, ambulance, local authorities and, where required, the armed forces. Oxfordshire's strategic context strengthens - rather than distracts from - the case for maintaining strong local fire cover. The county hosts nationally significant defence infrastructure, including RAF Brize Norton and RAF Benson, and supports major transport and logistics corridors. Civil defence planning in such contexts depends on proximity, redundancy and distributed local capacity. Closing fire stations and centralising response reduces surge capability and creates single points of failure, precisely when resilience depends on having multiple, locally available response assets.

Oxfordshire's strategic context is further reinforced by the presence of MoD Bicester, a major defence logistics and storage site involving vehicles, fuel and military equipment, where any serious incident would require an immediate, substantial fire and rescue response, underlining the importance of strong local fire cover. This supporting context reinforces the conclusion already reached elsewhere in this response: now is not the time to reduce local fire and rescue capacity. Strengthening everyday community safety also strengthens preparedness for exceptional events. Maintaining and strengthening local fire stations is therefore both a practical and responsible contribution to public safety and long-term resilience.

10. Our Requests and Recommendations

- Do not proceed with any decisions about closure of Woodstock or Eynsham fire stations without an open and inclusive debate about what could be done to improve services with contributions from all sides, (including the FBU and ordinary firefighters).
- Rule out closure or downgrading of Kidlington Fire Station.
- Publish locality-level modelling (including 90th percentile and worst-case response times) for each affected community.
- Publish an equalities and rural-impact assessment showing which communities bear increased risk.

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- Adopt a properly funded on-call recruitment, and retention plan, including employer engagement.
- Increase funding for training in critical competencies.
- Commit to climate resilience planning and capacity building for storms, flooding and wildfire risk.

Overall Conclusions

Woodstock Town Council considers that the proposed fire station closures would not improve services for Woodstock or its surrounding communities. When taken alongside the potential closure or restructuring of Eynsham and Kidlington Fire Stations, **these proposals would materially undermine public safety and significantly reduce the resilience of the fire and rescue system across the area.**

Evidence collected from the Fire Stations demonstrates the importance of retaining local stations with specialist capabilities, stable staffing, local detailed knowledge and strong community integration. The Town's brave firefighters not only strengthen the resilience of the Town and Woodstock Town Council Response 19/01/2026 pg. 7 Blenheim Palace but also make a significant contribution to the wellbeing and cohesion of the community. Finally, in the context of accelerating climate change, rapid population growth resulting from new housing developments, the expansion of business and science parks, and increasing national and international security uncertainty, Oxfordshire should be strengthening and expanding its fire and rescue provision. Any proposal that risks reducing local capacity runs directly counter to the growing and foreseeable demands placed on the service.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Subject: Response to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Consultation

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority welcomes the opportunity to respond to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's consultation on proposals to improve Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. We recognise the importance of services keeping their operating models under review to ensure arrangements remain sustainable, effective, and aligned to evolving community risk. We are also mindful that changes of this nature can have wider consequences across borders, particularly within Thames Valley where operational resilience is closely interdependent. Having reviewed the proposals, the Authority's principal concern relates to Henley Fire Station and the proposal to close it. Our analysis indicates that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service already attend 66.4% of appliance mobilisations onto Henley's station ground, a significant proportion. This level of cross-border attendance places sustained operational pressure on our busiest station, Caversham Road in Reading. In practical terms, any reduction in Oxfordshire's local capability or availability around Henley is likely to increase both the frequency and duration of Royal Berkshire resources being deployed into Oxfordshire. Whilst we are committed to mutual aid and a resilient response to major and specialist incidents, we would like to ask Oxfordshire to set out

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clearly how this proposal would be mitigated operationally and, in particular, to evidence the anticipated impact on neighbouring services, especially Royal Berkshire.

In this context, the Authority also notes that alternative options, aimed at improving availability in the Henley area rather than closing the station would return additional resource into a station ground that already experiences high levels of demand and would reduce the current reliance on Royal Berkshire's attendance. We appreciate the financial and workforce considerations inherent in such decisions, but we consider it important that the consultation explicitly assesses all options in terms of overall Thames Valley system resilience.

The implications for Caversham Road, and for Royal Berkshire's wider resilience, are particularly material. Caversham Road is our busiest station and hosts specialist capabilities, including water rescue and animal rescue. If reduced local availability in and around Henley results in increased cross-border demand, we would expect this to extract Caversham Road and potentially Wokingham Road, more frequently, with consequent impacts on cover and resilience across Royal Berkshire. Increased extraction also carries a direct risk to our ability to maintain our own response standards, particularly at times of peak demand. In relation to specialist capabilities, when these assets are deployed cross-border, the appliance and crew, most notably from Caversham Road, are committed for the full duration of the incident. The effect of this is that the specialist capability is taken off the run for Berkshire during that period. This reduces resilience within our own area, particularly the rescue capability for the River Thames and increases the likelihood of secondary extractions, diminished cover, and longer response times for incidents elsewhere in Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire. More broadly, we are concerned about the cumulative effect that increased cross-border extraction could have on productivity e.g. specialist capability and readiness. Over time, higher rates of cross-border activity risk constraining training time, skills maintenance, and readiness, each of which has direct implications for our own risk profile and resilience. We would therefore welcome clarity on how Oxfordshire intends to ensure that the proposed changes do not, indirectly, reduce the availability and effectiveness of specialist capability across Thames Valley as a whole.

We have also considered the proposals relating to Wallingford and the potential move to Crowmarsh Gifford. From Royal Berkshire's perspective, whether the station remains in Wallingford or relocates to Crowmarsh Gifford is unlikely to materially change the crossborder impact, as both options sit on the same risk footprint in relation to Henley's station ground. For completeness, the Authority has no significant concerns with the majority of proposals set out within the consultation, including Wholetime Duty System conversions elsewhere and the position relating to Faringdon. We recognise the potential benefit of increased daytime availability across the Thames Valley where this improves system-wide resilience. We would, however, welcome being kept informed of any further review of specialist rescue capabilities arising from the proposed consolidation at Kidlington, so that any changes are understood, risk-assessed, and coordinated across neighbouring services where appropriate.

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Finally, we consider it important that this consultation is viewed in the wider Thames Valley context. The Authority notes that Buckinghamshire's current proposals may compound cross-border pressures; for example, potential changes affecting on-call appliances in locations such as Beaconsfield and Stokenchurch. The combined effect of changes across the three services could increase demand on Royal Berkshire without equivalent mitigation. We would therefore encourage Oxfordshire to take a system-wide approach to evaluating cumulative impact, and to set out how cross-border effects will be monitored and managed jointly with neighbouring services should proposals proceed.

Royal Berkshire remains committed to constructive collaboration with Oxfordshire. We would welcome further engagement to review cross-border demand modelling (including assumptions on availability and mobilisation), to understand proposed mitigations should the Henley closure proceed, and to agree appropriate governance and monitoring arrangements to track cross-border impacts after implementation. We would also be content to share relevant incident and mobilisation data to support this work, and to help ensure that consultation outcomes are evidence-based, transparent, and aligned to the shared resilience needs of Thames Valley communities.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Jeff Brooks Wayne Bowcock

Chair, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Chief Fire Officer,

Cherwell District Council

Re: Consultation on Proposals to Improve Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

Dear Sir/Madam,

Cherwell District Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the consultation concerning proposed changes to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. We appreciate the detailed analysis provided and recognise the operational challenges that have prompted this review—particularly the continued difficulties in recruiting and retaining on-call firefighters and ensuring resilient daytime fire engine availability.

We understand the intention behind the proposed changes and the desire to align resources more closely with risk, improve response resilience, and secure long-term sustainability. The Council acknowledges the importance of continuous improvement and the pressures that all public sector organisations must contend with.

However, while the Council supports the principle of modernisation, we have several significant concerns regarding the impact of the proposals on Cherwell district, our local communities, and on the wider strategic context in which these decisions are being made.

Local Identity, Visibility, and Community Connections

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Cherwell District Council remains concerned about the effect of any reduction in locally based fire provision. Fire stations in our communities play an essential preventative, educational, and confidence-building role. They are trusted, visible assets that help maintain strong community identity and public assurance.

Any proposals involving closure, merger, reductions in full-time staffing, or changes to shift patterns risk eroding essential community connections and may undermine public confidence, even where modelling forecasts only marginal response-time changes.

Position of Cherwell District Council – Full Council Motion

Following a motion agreed by Full Council, please note the Council's formal position is as follows:

Council believes:

- Closing and merging stations could increase average response times, when Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's response times are already significantly longer than the national average.
- The loss of four full-time firefighter positions in Banbury and the implementation of 12-hour shifts at Bicester could have a detrimental impact on public safety in Cherwell.
- Decisions on fire service changes must prioritise public safety above financial or administrative considerations.

Council therefore resolves to:

- Support residents and firefighters in Oxfordshire by making clear our opposition to the reduction in firefighter numbers, the implementation of 12-hour shifts, and the merger of Kidlington and Rewley Road Fire Stations.

Timing of Proposed Changes – Governance Stability and Strategic Uncertainty

The consultation documents highlight that the need for change has been apparent since 2023. While we recognise the need to respond to operational pressures, Cherwell District Council has concerns about implementing significant structural reforms at a time of ongoing uncertainty around the forthcoming mayoral strategic authority. The precise responsibilities, governance arrangements, and implications for fire and rescue services have not yet been confirmed, meaning that major decisions taken now may need revisiting once the new authority's powers and responsibilities are clarified.

Additionally, possible Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) changes introduce further uncertainty about future boundaries and responsibilities. Introducing wholescale change before the wider governance landscape settles risks misalignment, duplication of effort, or reduced effectiveness.

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While continuous improvement is important, we believe it would be prudent to avoid large-scale structural change until there is greater clarity about the future governance structures.

Key Principles and the Need for Broader Considerations

Cherwell District Council recognises the key principles behind the proposed changes, aligning resources to risk, improving resilience, and ensuring long-term sustainability. These are sensible and important foundations. The role of fire stations as core hubs for community focus, safety and prevention work. The cumulative impact of multiple changes on staff morale, recruitment, and retention. Understands the operational challenges but has concerns about the local impacts of the proposed changes. Opposes reductions in firefighter numbers, the introduction of 12-hour shifts, and the proposed merger of Kidlington and Rewley Road stations. Stresses that public safety must be prioritised above financial efficiency or estate rationalisation. Believes that large-scale change should be deferred until greater clarity exists regarding the mayoral authority and any potential LGR outcomes. Encourages broader consideration of socio-economic, community, and workforce impacts not fully reflected in the consultation documentation.

However, the Council believes that additional considerations could have been included, such as:

Cherwell District Council's Summary Position

In summary, Cherwell District Council:

Conclusion

Cherwell District Council remains committed to supporting a resilient, trusted, and community-embedded fire and rescue service. We ask that Oxfordshire County Council proceed with caution, ensuring that any changes safeguard public confidence, protect local identity, and remain fully aligned with the evolving strategic landscape. We appreciate the opportunity to respond and look forward to continued constructive engagement.

Yours faithfully,

Tim Hughes
Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety
On behalf of Cherwell District Council

Cllr Carl Rylett, West Oxfordshire District Council, Eynsham Parish Council

As a representative of Eynsham at both parish and district level I have had the opportunity to meet the Chief Fire Officer and ask questions, and contributed to the response from WODC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, so will stick to just the comments below

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Shortcomings of consultation: As a data analyst by trade, I would echo the comments of those who have said the data has not been presented clearly. I appreciate the providing of a large quantity of information, but for those without the many hours needed to go through the details, a clear summary of the most meaningful insights of the data would have been helpful. As an example, it is not clear about the impact on response times to Eynsham village of the changes, which surely must be understood clearly before any decision is made. In addition, a major flaw of the consultation is a lack of alternative options and assessment of impact of each. Eynsham Station Response Times: The local Eynsham firefighters have given a compelling story about how they could be able to improve availability, and are already doing so. Given the new context of the threat of losing the station, I think it highly likely that villagers and local businesses would respond positively to a recruitment campaign to help keep the station open. Appropriate time should be given to allow this to happen, which if successful would allow Eynsham station to play a positive role in the improvement of Oxfordshire's Fire and Rescue Service

Regards
Cllr Carl Rylett

Chipping Norton Town Council

Ref: CHIPPING NORTON TOWN COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE 'CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE'

Chipping Norton Town Council is opposed to the changes proposed to the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service set out in the Oxfordshire County Council/Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Consultation Document.

We join with our colleagues in other Councils across Oxfordshire in calling for them to be withdrawn.

RATIONALE AND REASONS FOR OUR DECISION

1 IMPACTS AS IDENTIFIED BY OCC/OFRS IN THEIR DOCUMENT

- 'Fewer Fire Engines available at night'
- 'Lower morale'
- 'Possible job losses'
- 'Slight delay in second fire engine at night'
- 'Slight increase in response times in Oxford'

2 IMPACTS AS IDENTIFIED BY THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

- 'Close Five Fire Stations' - Eynsham, Woodstock and Henley plus merge Rewley Road in Oxford and Kidlington'

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- 'Remove Six Fire Engines - one from Henley, Thame, Eynsham, Woodstock, plus two from Rewley Road
- 'Cut 42 Firefighters'
- 'Force crews to unsafe 12-hour Shifts
- 'Remove a Specialist Rescue Vehicle from Kidlington Fire Station'

3 FLAWS IN THE MAIN PROPOSAL TO CREATE FIVE DAY SHIFT FIRE STATIONS

The main proposal suggests turning five currently on-call fire stations at Bicester, Chipping Norton, Faringdon, Wallingford and Witney implementing 12-hour day shifts and replacing current on-call crews with full-time firefighters in the day whilst hoping to cover nights with an on-call crew.

- It states that most incidents occur during the day. THIS IS NOT THE CASE IN CHIPPING NORTON. Here we have a slightly higher number of incidents at night. Currently 52% at night; 48% in the day. Incidents which occur at night are much more dangerous. OUR COMMUNITY MUST HAVE GUARANTEED NIGHT COVER WHICH IS EQUAL TO OR BETTER THAN WE HAVE NOW. THIS NOT GUARANTEED IN THE CONSULTATION DOCUMENT. 4 IMPACTS ON CHIPPING NORTON • Introducing full-time 12-hour shifts on days will mean that 50% OF OUR CURRENT ON-CALL CREW WILL LOSE THEIR JOBS. The proposals would mean redundancy for those members of our On-Call crew who only give day cover.
- This would have a knock-on effect for nighttime cover for Chipping Norton because these firefighters that cover the day also assist in providing night cover.
- Without them THERE WOULD BE NO GUARANTEED FIRE COVER BASED IN CHIPPING NORTON OVERNIGHT to crew our Fire Engine.
- The closest guaranteed appliance would come from Banbury. This would mean a much longer response time to incidents. We consider this to be dangerous and create greater risk to life and property in our community.
- We would see the break-up and loss of our dedicated and highly trained and motivated local crew who have years of experience and invaluable local knowledge.
- The proposals state that Whole Time Day Cover would allow for 'more community activities to take place'. This is not true for Chipping Norton. The authors of the report clearly have no knowledge of the huge amount of community engagement that our crew are involved in every year from school visits to station Open Day's and visits, to Safety and Well Being visits to the vulnerable, to attending many community events such as fetes, Pride and the Remembrance Day Parade.
- There is a very strong bond between our On-Call Crew and our Town and the surrounding villages. They are hugely valued members of our Community. We view the proposals as threatening that valued and irreplaceable link and strong bond.

IN CONCLUSION

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It is for all these reasons that Chipping Norton Town Council opposes the current proposals and calls for them to be withdrawn. We believe that they are dangerous and are not a solution to any of the challenges faced by OCC and OFRS in providing safe and reliable Fire and Rescue Services in Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely,
Katherine
On behalf of Chipping Norton Town Council

Eynsham Parish Council

Dear Sir

I would like to submit my response to your consultation via this email. I found responding to the survey tedious because it expects me to respond to all aspects and takes far too long

I'd like to strongly object to the closure of the Eynsham Fire Service for the following reasons

1. The residents of Eynsham will always be better served by an on-call fire station within the parish rather then engines from Witney or Kidlington. By closing our station, you are increasing the risk to our residents and their property. The Eynsham crew will respond in 6 minutes, an on-call engine from Witney could be 15-20 mins. That put lives at risk and is not acceptable
2. The selection of Eynsham for closure is fundamentally flawed. It's based on out of date information gathered during a period of high staff turnover. With new recruits in place the performance has significantly improved and it would be unfair to close the station based on past performance and not current performance
3. You have not given the fire station and the community of Eynsham fair opportunity to respond to low performance figures. The residents have been unawares that this was an issue and have been denied an opportunity to support.
4. Similarly the local business community who benefit from the close proximity of the fire station. They were unawares of the situation and could assist in finding an supporting new fire fighters
5. The parish of Eynsham is expanding rapidly, the number of homes is set to more than double over the next 10-15 years. That brings with it more demand for the fire service but also clear opportunity to recruit more on call fire fighters
6. Its short-sighted planning to remove a critical piece of infrastructure that is in good order. Once closed it can never be replaced
7. The key driver of these proposals is increase safety and not cost savings. I fail to see how closing the Eynsham Station plus 2 more and making 42 firefighter redundant will achieve this. I urge you to reconsider your proposal and retain Eynsham fire

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station. I have not responded on the other aspects of the proposal as these areless impactful on Eynsham and would require significant further research to fully understand and respond constructively

Regards
Ross
Ross Macken
Chair, Eynsham Parish Council

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service

RE: Consultation on Improving our Fire and Rescue Service

Thank you for engaging us as a key stakeholder in the *Improving our Fire and Rescue Service* operating model consultation. We appreciate the opportunity to review the proposals and to contribute to the development of a future model that supports resilient, efficient and community-focused fire and rescue services across Oxfordshire and the wider region.

We recognise the significant challenges facing Fire and Rescue Services nationally, including population growth, increasingly complex demand, workforce pressures and financial constraints. In this context, the ambition to better align resources to risk while strengthening prevention and protection activity is both appropriate and timely.

Having reviewed the summary proposals, we would like to offer the following strategic observations for consideration and continued dialogue:

Bicester Changes | We think adding day-crewed wholetime cover at Bicester is a positive step. It is close to our border and should help reduce daytime requests for support from Northamptonshire. **Night-Time Cover |** We are a little concerned about night-time resilience relying more on on-call crews, especially as availability has been dropping over time. If this becomes a bigger issue, we would welcome early conversations so we can plan together.

Specialist Rescue | Kidlington has often supported us with specialist rescues. With the planned merger and redistribution of these skills, we would like to know where these capabilities will sit in future and what that means for response times.

Overall Appliance Numbers | Reducing the fleet from 34 to 28 engines is understandable given the pressures you face, but it could affect mutual aid during major incidents or spate conditions. We would like to keep working together to manage resilience.

Prevention and Protection Work | We are pleased to see the focus on prevention and protection. There is a real opportunity for joint work in areas near the border, like Bicester and Banbury.

Thanks again for involving us. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you to keep our communities safe.

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Yours sincerely

Nikki Watson QPM
Chief Fire Officer

Cllr Gareth Epps, Deddington Division, Oxfordshire County Council

I thought I should write formally to follow up some of the issues that were raised with Cllr Gordon and I in relation to the Cover Model proposals as they affect Kidlington specifically.

It is useful to see this in the context of the representations made by FBU reps at JCC on Friday.

Crew changes from 7-5 to 6-4

First, having seen FBU material on social media in the Banbury area, it was suggested that this was a new change to terms and conditions. I now understand the situation to be that this change has been agreed as part of a previous negotiation, but is currently only in place in Abingdon and Didcot. The changes would extend this to Kidlington (and Banbury and other locations). Crews have concern that this leads to a dependence on overtime for cover to keep engines active due to sickness etc. Coupled with rest requirements and the additional limitations of 12 hour shifts, capacity for this will lead to resilience challenges.

[There's clear unhappiness about 12 hour shifts, particularly from those with family responsibilities]

There is localised concern about the proposed withdrawal of the rescue tender and the specialisms required to retain its functions, both in terms of the physical assets (non-standard equipment to be transported) and staff training required.

Of a direct and human need is that of clarity and certainty with regard to timescales for those currently in tied accommodation. Decisions about school choices and future employment will be among those people will need to make. At the very least, it would be helpful to clarify what is the earliest point at which the accommodation might be taken back, should the proposed merger of Kidlington and Rewley Road stations go ahead. With no location yet confirmed (although one must have been identified for the modelling) and the need for funding, design and construction, realistically it is unlikely to impact officers' living arrangements before 2029. It would be a sign of good faith and also of support for crew well-being if a form of words could be shared on that basis.

There is a concern that the consultation outcomes would be presented at the January Cabinet, just a couple of days after the consultation closes. For many reasons, I hope this is not the case.

There's clearly a concern that when further information is requested as part of the consultation, the response is characterised as: "we haven't got the details". While

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clearly there are aspects of these plans that require further work, anything that can be done to counter that characterisation would be well received.

There are concerns as to how major incidents requiring multiple crews - Blenheim Palace, the illegal waste dump near Kidlington, but also potential incidents in one of Oxford's many heritage assets - might be covered in the event of the closure of Rewley Road.

Overall (and I would like to better understand the views of retained fire crew in Deddington and elsewhere), it would be helpful if the County Council were seen to pause and reflect once the consultation is complete. While I see no need to abandon it halfway through as the FBU and Cllr Lygo have demanded, there is clearly a need to ensure staff are supported, reassured and happy to continue in their roles.

Laura may have other questions about issues raised which I'd forgotten.

Cllr Gareth Epps
Liberal Democrat
Deddington Division

Witney Town Council

Witney Town Council Response to Oxfordshire County Council's

Consultation on Proposals to Improve Oxfordshire's Fire & Rescue Service

Witney Town Council is concerned about the potential impacts of these proposed changes to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, particularly the proposed closures of Eynsham and Woodstock fire stations. The Council considers that these closures would have a direct and adverse impact on emergency response provision in Witney and across West Oxfordshire.

The Town Council is concerned that meaningful engagement with frontline staff did not take place at an early stage of the proposals. It is noted that staff have disputed the data used to justify the changes, and it believes this raises significant concerns regarding the robustness of the evidence base.

Witney Town Council is also concerned that the proposed restructuring would make the recruitment and retention of on-call (retained) firefighters more difficult. This risks weakening the service's resilience at a time when a more supportive and sustainable structure is needed to ensure effective cover.

While the Town Council recognises that the proposals may bring some benefit to Witney through an increase in full-time firefighter provision, this appears to be at the detriment of neighbouring areas. The Council is particularly concerned about night-time cover and the overall availability of fire engines across West Oxfordshire as a whole, which could reduce the service's ability to respond effectively to incidents.

There are additional concerns regarding the potential impact on other services provided by the fire and rescue service, including responses to road traffic collisions and assistance during flooding incidents. Flooding is a particular concern in Witney, which

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has experienced significant issues over the past decade and is expected to remain vulnerable in the coming years. This raises questions about whether the fire service will continue to be able to provide timely support for pumping operations and recovery efforts.

Furthermore, the Town Council notes that there is substantial large-scale residential development planned and already underway across the district. On the outskirts of Witney alone, this amounts to more than 3,500 new homes. The Council seeks reassurance that the increased demand this will place on fire and rescue services has been fully taken into account, as long-term service capacity and sustainability are key concerns.

In summary, Witney Town Council urges Oxfordshire County Council to reconsider the proposed changes, engage more fully with staff, and ensure that future provision is based on robust data, supports recruitment and retention, and delivers a resilient, sustainable service for Witney and the wider West Oxfordshire area.

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Mrs Sharon Groth Assoc.CIPD FSLCC FCMI
Town Clerk
Cllr Andy Bailey
Mayor of Witney

Harwell Parish Council

Overview

Harwell Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals to

modernise and strengthen Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (OFRS). Our response focuses only on the implications for residents of Harwell parish and the wider Didcot/Science Vale area, where rapid population growth, major employment sites, and complex transport networks present particular risks.

While the consultation identifies pressures on the service, the Council is not persuaded that the proposed changes demonstrate that local response times or community safety will be maintained. Quick, reliable action remains fundamental to saving lives, and any changes must clearly show that risk will not increase.

Residents expect transparent processes and clear communication when changes to emergency response capability are being considered. Recent experience of county level consultation has not provided the level of transparency or trust that residents deserve.

2. Main Proposal – Creating Five Day-Shift Fire Stations

The proposal introduces 12-hour day-shift crewing at Bicester, Chipping Norton,

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Faringdon, Wallingford/Crowmarsh, and Witney.

Modelled outcomes indicate improved daytime first-engine response times and

significantly increased full-time daytime availability, reflecting the well-evidenced

challenges in daytime on-call recruitment and turnout.

Harwell Parish Council acknowledges the operational rationale presented but is not able to support the proposal on the basis of the evidence provided. However, these gains must not come at the expense of night-time response

capability, when communities are most dependent on reliable and rapid emergency

cover. At present, the Council is not satisfied that the proposals demonstrate nighttime resilience will be maintained.

3. Night-Time Resilience and Rural Cover

Under the proposals, the number of guaranteed full-time night-time engines would reduce from seven to six. The Council has significant concerns that this could slow response times in semi-rural and commuter-route areas such as Harwell.

Local councillors—reflecting resident sentiment—highlight specific risks:

- Night-time availability varies more significantly and is less predictable.
- Evening commuter traffic on the A34, A417 and other strategic routes increases the consequences of delayed response.
- Longstanding on-call recruitment and retention challenges must be stabilised before any reduction in night-time station coverage is confirmed.
- The Council requests publication of the full night-time response modelling and assurances that rural and semi-rural communities will not experience diminished resilience.

Clear mitigation plans are needed to ensure predictable cover during late evening and overnight periods. At this stage, the Council cannot support any reduction in guaranteed night-time cover without much stronger evidence that response performance will be protected.

4. Didcot Fire Station – Local Impact

Didcot Fire Station remains unchanged in the proposals. Harwell relies on Didcot for primary emergency cover, making the station's resilience fundamental to public safety in the parish.

The Council seeks reassurance that the county will:

- Maintain a sustainable crewing model as Science Vale continues to expand;
- Support consistent availability during peak-risk hours;
- Ensure operational strength along the A417/A34 corridor, which has a persistent pattern of serious incidents.

As the primary cover for Harwell and surrounding high-growth areas, Didcot's operational stability must not be diluted.

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5. Proposal A – New North Oxford Fire Station

There is no direct impact on Harwell. The Council does not offer a position on this proposal as it has no direct local impact.

However, modelling assumptions based on a station not yet confirmed or sited risk undermining the reliability of projections. Structural decisions should not rely on hypothetical infrastructure.

6. Proposal B – Removal of the Second Fire Engine at Thame

The Council does not comment on this proposal as it has no direct local impact. The Council requests continuous monitoring of response times and incident risk, to ensure that any reduction in capacity does not adversely affect nearby communities.

7. Proposal C – Closure of Three On-Call Stations

The Council does not take a position on closures outside the Harwell area but requests continued monitoring of any indirect impacts on Didcot or Science Vale.

The Council strongly requests:

- A published transition plan showing how gaps in night-time and rural resilience will be mitigated;
- Confirmation that any efficiencies generated will be reinvested into prevention, resilience, and improved on-call recruitment—particularly in high-growth areas such as Science Vale.

8. Investment Proposals (D, E, F)

The Council supports prioritising:

- Expanded Station Support Officer roles;
- Maintaining adequate crewing levels across the service;
- Protecting Oxford's 24/7 capacity where sustainable funding is secured.

Recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters must become a strategic priority. Without improved stability in the on-call model, wider structural changes risk creating gaps in night-time resilience.

9. Prevention and Community Safety

Harwell Parish Council welcomes the strengthened emphasis on prevention and community safety, including targeted support for vulnerable residents and workplaces with elevated risk profiles.

Increased daytime professional capacity should translate into practical, local delivery—not simply aspirational targets.

10. Transparency, Trust and Decision-Making

The Council emphasises the need for open and accessible public engagement when reshaping essential emergency services. Residents deserve clarity, candour, and

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meaningful opportunities to understand how changes will affect local safety and response capability. Given recent experiences of county-level consultation, the Council urges OFRS to adopt a more transparent, accountable approach as these proposals develop.

11. Conclusion

Harwell Parish Council is not able to support the proposals as currently presented. The Council requires further evidence and reassurance on the following points:

- Protection of night-time resilience across rural and commuter-route areas;
- Safeguarding the operational strength of Didcot Fire Station;
- Transparent modelling, particularly where assumptions rely on unconfirmed infrastructure;
- Reinforcement of on-call recruitment and retention before any reduction in night-time capacity;
- Reinvestment of efficiencies into prevention and operational resilience;
- Ongoing engagement with parish councils as implementation progresses.
- The Council limits its comments to matters with direct local impact and looks forward to more detailed engagement once stronger evidence is available.

Brize Norton Parish Council

Brize Norton Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation regarding the future service delivery model of the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS). While we recognise the service's need to ensure resources are matched to current risk profiles, we submit that the existing modelling fails to adequately account for the exceptional, immediate, and strategic growth mandated for West Oxfordshire, rendering the current proposals, especially those relating to the A40 corridor, unfit for purpose.

Our primary concern is that any proposal that seeks to reduce or relocate fire cover within the rapidly expanding West Oxfordshire area is fundamentally flawed, as it is based on historical data rather than verifiable future planning requirements.

The Scale of Strategic Growth in West Oxfordshire (2027–2043)

The West Oxfordshire District Council's Local Plan (2027–2043) dictates an unprecedented level of development that must be factored into all emergency service planning:

- District-Wide Requirement: WODC is required to deliver approximately 18,000 new homes within the 2027–2043 Plan Period.
- Strategic Corridor Focus: The A40 linking Eynsham, Witney, and Carterton is designated as a 'Strategic Corridor for Growth'. The development proposed

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within this corridor alone totals 10,800 new homes, representing the majority of the district's growth.

- Concentrated Pressure on Local Areas: This immense growth places unsustainable pressure on fire and rescue provision across the entire corridor:
- Eynsham Area: Plans for 3,200 new homes, including Salt Cross Garden Village. This village will also include employment land (40ha) which will generate 4,000 daily employees, dramatically increasing the daytime risk profile.
- Witney and Carterton Sub-Area: Significant planned development (as part of the 10,800 home total) within and around these existing service centres warrants a rigorous re-evaluation of crewing levels and resource availability at the Witney station and the newly relocated Carterton/Brize Norton station. This growth must directly inform decisions on how these key stations are crewed (e.g., wholetime vs. on-call provision).

Specific Concerns from Brize Norton Parish Council

On behalf of the residents of Brize Norton, we must also highlight that this Parish Council intends to recommend that WODC reconsiders development for 3,000 homes at Barnard Gate, located between Eynsham and Witney, as this site now complies with the Local Plan Spatial Strategy.

Should this proposal proceed alongside the existing Eynsham and A40 corridor plans, the immediate vicinity between Witney and the Oxford West entrance will absorb over 6,000 new homes and 4,000 new jobs, vastly increasing the call-out density and required response times for the OFRS.

Recommendation for Re-evaluation

Given the scale of planned and mandated development, particularly the designation of the A40 corridor as the primary focus for growth in West Oxfordshire, Brize Norton Parish Council strongly recommends that the OFRS re-evaluate its resource planning entirely for this area.

The immense volume of new risk being concentrated across the entire Strategic Corridor (Eynsham, Witney, and Carterton) requires a corresponding, enhanced, and permanent provision.

We request that the OFRS modelling be revised to include the full future population and employment load of the WODC Local Plan 2043 and that this strategic, long-term risk profile guides the final decision on the Main Proposal and all subsequent Options (A-F). Specifically, the viability of a permanent, enhanced fire station presence in Eynsham and the crewing and operational levels of the existing/relocated stations at Witney and Carterton/Brize Norton should be examined to ensure adequate response times and safety for this rapidly transforming community.

Kind regards

Jo Webb
Clerk to Brize Norton Parish Council

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West Oxfordshire District Council

West Oxfordshire District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 7 January 2026 to consider Oxfordshire County Council's consultation proposals titled "Improving our fire and rescue service". This followed a motion at the 3 December 2025 full Council meeting titled "Protecting Fire Services in West Oxfordshire", which was referred to the Committee by Council.

The meeting was attended by Mr Macdougall as the Community Safety and Chief Fire Officer, who introduced the proposals and answered questions. The Committee then considered and debated its response to the proposals on behalf of the Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that West Oxfordshire District Council;

1. Formally wishes to thank the Community Safety and Chief Fire Officer for his attendance and time spent answering the Committee's questions.
2. Opposes the implementation of the proposal being consulted on as it currently stands due to the loss of the fire stations in Eynsham and Woodstock and the concerns detailed below.
3. Has the following concerns over the proposal being consulted on:
    a. Disproportionate adverse impacts on West Oxfordshire, which stands to potentially lose two fire stations.
    b. A lack of detail on real response time impacts and worst-case response time impacts (rather than average response times) of the proposed closures of Woodstock and Eynsham fire stations on rural communities in West Oxfordshire. Decision makers and residents require more detailed information.
    c. Recruitment opportunities not being fully explored as an alternative to closures e.g. more outreach to employers.
    d. A lack of information for decision makers on the impact of higher station availability on response times, if stations were to kept open and on-call staffing enhanced.
    e. Housing growth not being fully considered in the report, which will increase the local demand for services and the pool of potential fire fighters over time.
    f. A lack of assurance that a new facility in North Oxford will come forwards.
    g. The need for greater transparency on how proposed changes to staffing patterns (i.e. more full-time fire fighters) will be funded.
    h. Impacts of proposed closures on lives, residents, firefighters, climate change, flood risk, protection of the Blenheim World Heritage site.
    i. Staff morale for on-call firefighters in particular, and potential job losses if closures go ahead.
    j. The overall level of data provided in the consultation and the fact that the investment proposals (E and F) don't have free text boxes unlike the other consultation questions.

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4. Requests that the implementation of the proposals is deferred until the concerns have been addressed and enough time has been given to exploring the alternatives.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Andrew Beaney
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Genny Early
Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Fire and Rescue Services Association Response to: Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Consultation – 'Improving our fire and rescue service'

1. Introduction

Founded in 1976, the Fire and Rescue Services Association (FRSA) is a national, independent, member-led trade union representing other public-spirited individuals who are primarily On-Call firefighters. In 2018 the union changed its name from the Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU) to the FRSA to take account that our membership had been widened to welcome other fire service employees (grey and green book staff) who are more aligned with our values, our professional approach to negotiating local terms and conditions and how we positively and pragmatically represent our members at local and national level.

We ourselves are a broad-church, representing a wide range of political views, but with a common commitment to serve the local and national communities. For this reason, we have agreed not to exercise our right to strike, as our members cannot, in clear conscience, place their communities at risk by withdrawing their professional services.

2. The Community Risk Management Plan Process

Prior to reforms in 2004, the location of fire stations and crews was based on national standards of fire cover. These standards were developed pre-war to ensure both national consistency and the protection of vital infrastructure. These standards enabled the responsible authorities to plan within a very structured system. There were however increasing difficulties with this process. Fire and rescue services found the process too rigid. They were often compelled to place resources in areas which they knew were fundamentally low risk, and at the expense of areas with higher risk.

To overcome this problem the government removed the requirement for fire and rescue authorities to follow national standards, but mandated that new plans be produced based on local assessment of risk. These were known as Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs). The purpose of these plans was to integrate the analysis of risk along with mechanisms to ameliorate it. Fire and rescue authorities could set their own response times based on the assessment of risk in their area, amend duty systems to meet that risk, and at the same time engage in prevention activities to reduce risk wherever possible. Risk was not the same as demand. For example, major

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infrastructure facilities may have very low demand upon the emergency services, but in the event of something going wrong, would create a major emergency. High rise buildings have relatively recently been recognised as potentially high risk with additional duties on key stakeholders to ensure not only their safety, but an adequate emergency response. The IRMP process has subsequently been renamed the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) but remains essentially the same.

In addition, under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, fire and rescue authorities were given specific duties to prepare for emergencies and engage with other emergency services to overcome these risks. Under the Act, Category 1 responders, including fire and rescue authorities, have a duty to plan for a major emergency as defined by the Act – and this can include being able to function due to a shortage of staff. In preparing their plans fire and rescue authorities need to ensure that they have resources available to cope with major emergencies.

Our response to the proposals draw on our experience of almost 50 years, representing members at local and national level and putting forward evidenced arguments to maintain and modernise the On-Call duty system (OCDS). There have been numerous studies and reports published over the years by a wide variety of organisations and groups which have highlighted the problems the OCDS faces in the modern day but more importantly the solutions which are available to not just overcome the problems but to make a sustainable framework for decades to come.

Visionary fire and rescue services have already put measures in place to reverse the downward trend of On-Call appliance availability and are already reaping rewards (Mid and West Wales, Shropshire, Devon and Somerset, Lancashire, Humberside etc). Fire and rescue services that believe in the OCDS and the economic and societal benefits it brings. There are also those who do not and have never believed in the OCDS and prefer to revert to what they know, understand and are comfortable with, irrespective of whether that provides the tax-payer with best value (see Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire).

Our concern is that these proposals fit into the latter category, using biased evidence to justify their preferred outcome. In our experience ORH Ltd has a proven track record of facilitating the decline and demise of the OCDS. ORH is not independent and we believe that this company has been chosen due to its track record of providing evidence to argue reductions in On-Call establishments, a simple ‘google-search’ will confirm this.

When formalising our response to this consultation we have specifically used the latest research into the OCDS published by Exact Consultants, a document that has been shared with all Chief Fire Officers in the UK, the research was joint funded by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Ministry of Housing and Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and is available on our website.

3. Our response

Closing On-Call stations may show small countywide averages, but it weakens local resilience and community safety.

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The consultation sets out that Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock have low staffing hours and that closure is modelled to add only **1–2 seconds** to *average* first appliance response times across Oxfordshire (and 1 second to second appliance in Henley's case).

But **countywide averages are the wrong lens** for judging station closure decisions, because they can conceal:

- **place-based impacts** (the communities around each station lose the nearest local crew and local knowledge);
- **system resilience impacts** (loss of "depth" for concurrent incidents, spate
- conditions, extreme weather, major road closures, and large-scale events);
- **prevention/protection capacity impacts** (On-Call stations are often the visible local interface for prevention activity and community risk reduction, especially in rural and semi-rural areas);
- **future recovery risk** (once stations and teams are lost, rebuilding On-Call capability is significantly harder than improving it).

The NFCC national study explicitly cautions that headline performance measures can incentivise the wrong decisions if they are not sufficiently linked to community risk and resilience outcomes.

The consultation itself evidences the problem: On-Call hours are falling—but that is exactly what the national study says can be tackled.

The consultation describes a "critical shortage" of On-Call staffing hours, including a reported **36% drop in full-time equivalent On-Call firefighters over 10 years**, and that at peak times "only around 5 out of 27 On-Call fire engines would be available."

That challenge is real. But the NFCC research is clear that across the UK, the principal problems are recruitment/retention fragility, training/competence burden, employer release barriers, and culture and it sets out a practical reform agenda to reverse decline.

In other words: Oxfordshire's stated driver for change is **precisely the national "On-Call sustainability" problem** and the national solution is **more reform**, not shrinking the On-Call estate.

The closure proposal conflicts with what NFCC says "good" looks like: invest,

modernise, and widen the pool.

The NFCC report's recommendations include, among other actions:

- **flexible/tiered contracts** to widen the applicant pool (micro-roles, school-hours cover, different commitment levels);
- **modular/blended training** to shorten time to first deployment and fit around work/family life;
- **employer engagement programmes** (toolkits, incentives/recognition, practical rostering support);

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- **culture change** to address "two-tier" perceptions between wholetime and On-Call, improving morale and retention;
- **data and performance improvements** linked to risk, not just simplistic availability figures.

Closing stations is not a substitute for doing the above. If Oxfordshire proceeds to close stations because cover is low, that risks becoming a **self-fulfilling spiral**: reduced visibility → reduced recruitment → reduced availability → further closures.

There are demonstrated alternatives that improve availability without removing On-Call stations.

The NFCC study contains multiple UK case studies where services improved On-Call availability through targeted reforms e.g. flexible contracting, modular training, continuous recruitment, hybrid "work from station" arrangements, employer engagement, broadening roles, and better utilisation of partial On-Call staffing.

These approaches are directly relevant to Oxfordshire because the consultation's main challenge is **weekday daytime cover**, which is exactly where employer release, flexibility, and training design matter most.

Specific concerns about workforce impact: "possible job losses" should be treated as a red line.

The main proposal and related changes acknowledge potential impacts including **"possible job losses"** for some On-Call staff (including those who work daytime-only and those affected at Rewley Road).

Redundancy risk and station closures undermine retention, morale and trust factors the NFCC report highlights as central to the sustainability of the On-Call system. If the goal is to increase On-Call availability, then creating conditions that push experienced On-Call firefighters out is counterproductive.

What Oxfordshire should do instead (aligned to NFCC evidence).

We ask the Service and the Fire Authority to **remove** the proposal to close Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock from the options taken forward, and instead commit to a time-bound On-Call improvement programme with measurable outcomes.

Below is a practical package drawn from the NFCC recommendations and case studies.

A. A 12–24 month "On-Call Availability Recovery Plan" (before any closures)
   - **Set clear targets** (e.g., "increase availability of named On-Call appliances during
   - weekday daytime by X% in 12 months"), with transparent reporting.
   - **Use risk-linked measures**, not just "averages", and report locality-level effects (including concurrent incident resilience).
   - **Protect stations while rebuilding**: treat station closures as a last resort after the recovery plan is attempted and independently evaluated.

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B. Modernise recruitment: widen the pool, reduce drop-out, speed up "time to competence"

Implement the NFCC "Top recruitment actions", particularly:

- **tiered/flexible contracts** and micro-commitments to attract people who cannot do traditional hours;
- **faster, candidate-friendly recruitment processes** with active management of attrition points;
- **modular/blended initial training** so recruits become deployable sooner and can train around work;
- **targeted recruitment using data** to focus on high-potential communities and demographics (including women and underrepresented groups).

C. Employer engagement: make weekday cover feasible

The consultation narrative recognises modern work patterns as a key barrier.

NFCC's evidence-based answer is: structured employer engagement (toolkits, agreements, recognition and incentives).

Oxfordshire should:

- build formal **employer release agreements** for priority stations;
- offer **recognition schemes** for supportive employers;
- actively target **work-from-home** populations and local large employers.

D. Retention and culture: stop the "two-tier" damage

The NFCC report is explicit that a perceived two-tier workforce undermines morale, recruitment and retention.

Oxfordshire should commit to:

- regular retention check-ins and exit interviews;
- visible parity of esteem (development pathways, inclusion, leadership behaviour standards);
- improving facilities and kit fit to remove barriers (particularly for women).

E. Better utilisation of On-Call capacity (even when full crews aren't available)

NFCC case studies show services making smarter use of partial On-Call availability e.g. incident support teams or alternative crewing approaches that increase overall resilience.

This can help Oxfordshire convert "some availability" into "useful operational contribution" rather than treating stations as either fully available or not.

Questions we ask the Fire Authority to answer before proceeding

- **What specific NFCC-recommended recruitment/retention reforms have been trialled in Oxfordshire, for how long, and with what measured outcomes?**
- **What is the plan to prevent closures from worsening recruitment** (by reducing local visibility and confidence in the On-Call role)?

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- Given the consultation proposes reinvestment opportunities/efficiencies, **what proportion of any savings will be ring-fenced for On-Call sustainability measures** (contracts, training redesign, employer engagement, facilities)?
- How will decision-makers evaluate **local risk and resilience impacts**, not just countywide averages?

Insufficient scrutiny of workforce utilisation and value for money.

While the consultation places strong emphasis on the availability challenges of On-Call fire stations, it provides **little equivalent scrutiny of the utilisation, workload, or cost-effectiveness of Wholetime fire stations and appliances**, despite these representing the highest proportion of the Service's revenue spend.

Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service currently operates six Wholetime stations and seven Wholetime fire engines, staffed either 24/7 or under day-crewing arrangements. These resources are permanently staffed and therefore incur significantly higher ongoing costs than On-Call appliances. However, the consultation and supporting ORH modelling do not publish:

- incidents attended per Wholetime station or appliance;
- incidents attended per Wholetime firefighter;
- comparative cost per incident between Wholetime and On-Call appliances; or
- any assessment of whether Wholetime resources are proportionate to local risk and demand.

This absence of data is notable because **low incident volumes are explicitly cited elsewhere in the consultation as justification for removing or downgrading On-Call appliances**. For example, the consultation highlights that the second fire engine at Thame attended only around 17 incidents per year within Oxfordshire, and this is used as evidence that its continued operation cannot be justified.

No equivalent test is applied to Wholetime appliances, despite their far higher staffing and infrastructure costs.

This creates an **unequal evidential standard**, where:

- On-Call resources are required to demonstrate high utilisation to justify their existence;
- Wholetime resources are largely assumed to be efficient and necessary, without published evidence of workload or value for money.

The ORH modelling focuses primarily on response time optimisation and appliance availability, which are important metrics, but **do not in themselves measure operational demand, efficiency, or cost-effectiveness**. Improvements of a few seconds in average response times are used to justify substantial permanent staffing increases and station relocations, yet consultees are not provided with the information needed to assess whether these Wholetime resources are heavily used relative to their cost.

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The NFCC On-Call Research Study explicitly warns against relying on narrow availability and response metrics, noting that:

- availability does not necessarily equate to risk;
- headcount does not equate to operational value; and
- under-utilised appliances should be reviewed so that savings can be redirected into improving workforce sustainability.

Importantly, this recommendation is **not limited to On-Call appliances**. The principle applies equally to Wholetime resources.

Before any decision is taken to close On-Call stations or remove On-Call firefighters, the Fire Authority should therefore publish transparent, station-level data showing:

- the average number of incidents attended annually by each Wholetime fire engine and station;
- the estimated cost per incident by crewing model;
- comparative utilisation of Wholetime and On-Call appliances; and
- how these figures relate to local risk profiles rather than countywide averages.

Without this information, it is not possible for the public to assess whether the proposals genuinely "match resources to risk", or whether lower-cost On-Call capability is being reduced while higher-cost Wholetime capacity is protected from equivalent scrutiny.

In the context of the NFCC's national evidence, it would be premature and potentially counterproductive to close On-Call stations without first demonstrating that all Wholetime resources are proportionately utilised, cost-effective, and optimally aligned to risk.

Conclusion

The consultation places significant emphasis on the availability challenges of On-Call fire stations yet provides little evidence on the operational demand or cost-effectiveness of Wholetime fire stations. In contrast, low incident numbers at certain On-Call appliances are used to justify their removal.

Before any On-Call stations are closed, the Fire Authority should publish station-level data showing incidents attended per appliance, per firefighter, and per £ spent across both Wholetime and On-Call models. Without this, it is impossible for consultees to assess whether resources are genuinely being matched to risk, or whether high-cost Wholetime capacity is being protected from scrutiny.

The NFCC On-Call Research Study recommends reviewing under-used appliances and redirecting savings into improving On-Call recruitment and retention. This principle should apply equally to Wholetime resources.

Oxfordshire's challenge declining On-Call hours and daytime appliance availability is exactly the national sustainability challenge described in the NFCC On-Call Research Study.

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The national evidence shows that **more can and should be done** to improve recruitment and retention through flexible contracting, modular training, employer engagement, culture change, and risk-linked performance management.

For those reasons, we urge Oxfordshire County Council and Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service to:

- **reject the closure of Eynsham, Henley, and Woodstock On-Call stations,**
- **avoid the loss of On-Call firefighters,**

and instead adopt a properly funded, time-bound On-Call improvement plan aligned to NFCC's recommendations and proven practice.

Ends

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Oxfordshire Fire Brigades Union Formal Consultation Response

Fire & Rescue Cover Model proposals / "Improve our fire and rescue service"

Submitted on behalf of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), Oxfordshire
Date: 31 January 2026

Submission and position

This submission is made by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Oxfordshire. We represent operational firefighters whose work protects life, property and the environment. We also represent the professional voice of the workforce that provides emergency response at all hours, in all conditions, in every community across the county.

The FBU rejects the proposals being consulted upon. The package amounts to a reduction in fire cover and resilience dressed as "efficiency", with risks transferred from the service onto the public and the frontline. The proposals include station closures, removal of appliances, reduced guaranteed night-time cover, and a structural dependence on an already stretched on-call system. They are accompanied by workforce measures that raise serious safety concerns, including the prospect of reduced crewing and duty system changes that would intensify fatigue risk in a safety-critical service.

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We also reject the framing of these proposals as a technical adjustment to achieve "parity" or "optimal deployment". The consultation documents openly acknowledge that the model is expected to make the service in Oxford City "slightly worse", through a conscious transfer of resources away from the county's most deprived and most diverse area. That admission alone requires a higher standard of justification, a deeper equality analysis, and a clear demonstration that less harmful alternatives have been properly developed and considered. None of that has been provided to the standard required for a decision that puts life risk and firefighter safety at stake.

What is being consulted on, in the services' own terms

The services' own communications describe a set of proposals grouped under the themes of effectiveness, efficiency and investment. The "effectiveness" theme includes the introduction of five day-shift stations; removal of the on-call fire engine from Rewley Road; building a new fire station toward the north of Oxford combining Rewley Road and Kidlington; and reallocating specialist rescue capability across more stations with the disbanding of the specialist rescue unit at Kidlington. The "efficiency" theme includes removing the second fire engine from Thame and closing up to three on-call stations: Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock. The "investment" theme presents options that could be enabled by increasing revenue, including maintaining an additional 24/7 fire engine for Oxford, maintaining station establishment levels, and retaining Station Support Officers.

Alongside these public themes, staff materials clarify the operating logic. The service intends to redeploy wholetime firefighters into day shifts at stations that currently rely on on-call, because availability is lowest during daytime hours when demand is highest. At night, the service intends to rely more heavily on on-call cover, stating that on-call availability is "very good" at night and that this gives confidence in the approach. The same staff materials also introduce a major operational risk: if the day-shift model reduces watch establishments, management is considering either reducing normal crewing to four persons or creating new annual leave rules that restrict how much leave can be taken at any one time in order to retain five-person crewing. Both approaches have significant safety, fairness and workforce sustainability implications.

It is essential to recognise what this bundle of changes represents in real-world terms. It is not a single isolated adjustment; it is a system-wide reconfiguration that combines (a) reduced stations and appliances, (b) reduced guaranteed cover at key times, (c) reorganised duty systems, (d) dilution or removal of specialist capability, and (e) employment consequences including relocation, potential redundancy risk for on-call staff, and disruption to the Kidlington accommodation base. In a high-consequence public protection service, such a bundle must meet the highest tests of evidence, lawfulness, transparency and safety. It does not.

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Why the proposals are a reduction in cover and resilience, not an improvement

The proposals reduce the physical footprint of fire and rescue provision and weaken the system's capacity to cope with concurrent incidents and protracted events. Station closures remove local response assets and community presence. Appliance removals reduce the number of immediately available resources and increase reliance on distant mobilisations. The proposal to remove the on-call pump from Rewley Road, combined with the relocation/merger plan for Rewley Road and Kidlington, removes a long-established response base from the historic city centre. The proposal to remove a second appliance from Thame reduces the ability to sustain operations and to respond simultaneously across South Oxfordshire and the surrounding areas. The disbanding of specialist rescue capability from Kidlington reduces readiness for complex rescue scenarios and undermines multi-discipline resilience.

The service seeks to justify these changes through a "parity" argument: that rural areas are disadvantaged by poor on-call availability and that transferring resources can even out response performance. That framing is incomplete and unsafe. Fire and rescue risk is not a fairness exercise in equalising averages on a map; it is a duty to manage risk by ensuring the fastest possible effective intervention where life risk is highest, and by providing resilient capacity to handle what actually happens in real incidents: rapid escalation, delayed discovery, multiple calls, and overlapping emergencies. The correct question is not whether a county-wide average response time curve looks smoother; it is whether the system retains enough capacity, in the right places, at the right times, with the right skills, to save lives and protect firefighters across Oxfordshire. These proposals fail that test.

Even within the services' own documentation, the improvement narrative is contradicted by admissions of harm. The Equalities Impact Assessment explicitly states that Oxford City's response performance is forecast to be "slightly worse" under the options being put forward and describes this as a "conscious move" to transfer resources. Where a public service knowingly worsens emergency response in the county's most deprived and diverse area, it bears a heavy burden of justification. That burden has not been met.

Consultation process and governance: why the process is not fit for purpose

The FBU's formal correspondence to the Chief Fire Officer in October 2025 set out serious objections to the process by which these proposals were developed and communicated. The union's position was that proposals of this scale should not have been communicated to staff and the public before meaningful consultation and negotiation with the recognised union had taken place. Staff communications included FAQs and briefings that described potential redundancy consequences for on-call employees, and guidance about employee speech and media engagement, before the

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union had been provided with the full evidence base, the options appraisal, or the operational and equality analyses required for a meaningful response.

In response, the service asserted that it did not believe it had breached industrial relations protocols and stated that it had scheduled briefings with unions ahead of staff briefings. We do not accept that this meets the standard of meaningful consultation and negotiation expected in the fire and rescue sector, particularly under the National Joint Council principles and established "no-surprises" practice. Consultation is not a box-ticking exercise conducted after a plan is written and rolled out in internal briefings; it must occur at a formative stage, with adequate disclosure and genuine scope to influence outcomes.

Moreover, the staff briefing summary for those "likely to experience the most change" (Group 1) included a "Use of Social Media and Media Protocol" section that instructs employees not to engage with the media or post, comment, or share content related to the service on personal social media without prior approval. In the context of a public consultation on proposals that would reduce cover, remove stations and threaten job security, such guidance is not a neutral reminder. It has a chilling effect on lawful debate, on whistleblowing, and on union members' right to express concerns and participate in public discussion. A consultation conducted alongside a communications posture that appears to limit workforce voice cannot be regarded as genuinely open or inclusive.

The services' own culture roadshow document also provides context that cannot be ignored. It records staff concerns about a lack of genuine engagement in key initiatives, lack of clarity in decision-making, information overload, duplication, and the reality that on-call members "can't keep up to date" with key messages. The same material identifies a "Covid legacy" of feeling, repeated themes about trust, and a perceived weak feedback loop ("you feed back to you but then nothing happens"). Against this backdrop, the obligation on the service is to demonstrate exceptional transparency and collaboration, not to move fast to consultation while essential data and options remain contested.

Worsening industrial relations and the foreseeable risk of industrial action

The manner in which these proposals have been developed and communicated has already caused substantial and avoidable damage to industrial relations within Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. This is not a theoretical concern or a "tone" issue; it is an operational risk in its own right. Fire and rescue depends on trust, stability, and confidence—between the workforce, representative bodies, and senior decision-makers. A process that is perceived by frontline staff as pre-determined, publicly launched before genuine negotiation, and accompanied by communications that explicitly contemplate job loss and enforced contractual change creates predictable consequences: deepening mistrust, entrenched positions, and an escalating dispute environment that becomes increasingly difficult to resolve.

The Oxfordshire Fire Brigades Union has already been forced to take the exceptional step of making a formal complaint about the way the proposals were issued, on the basis that proper union engagement did not occur before staff and public communications were released. In our formal correspondence we set out that this approach is inconsistent with the agreed industrial

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relations framework and NJC expectations, and we made clear that failure to address the issue promptly may leave the union with no alternative but to escalate the matter through formal dispute procedures.

This is a critical point for the County Council and senior officers to absorb: the present approach is not simply generating disagreement with the *content* of the proposals; it is actively generating dispute about the *legitimacy of the process itself*. That dynamic is corrosive, and it is wholly avoidable if the proposals are withdrawn and replaced with genuine joint problem-solving from a formative stage.

Industrial relations have further deteriorated because the workforce has been confronted with communications that do not merely describe possible future organisational change, but explicitly foreshadow redundancy consultations, displacement, and significant alterations to duty systems and work locations. For example, the HR correspondence sets out scenarios where station or unit closure could trigger a redundancy consultation exercise, and also references the possibility of redundancy situations arising where employees cannot relocate or where on-call cover requirements are reduced.

Regardless of how the service attempts to frame these statements, the plain effect is to create immediate job insecurity and anxiety—*before* any meaningful negotiated resolution has been secured. This sequence—publishing "job-threatening" proposals and referencing redundancies before meaningful agreement with the recognised union—was one of the central reasons the FBU raised the formal objection in the first place.

In that context, it is entirely predictable—indeed inevitable—that the workforce response hardens and that members begin to demand that their union prepares to defend them using all lawful means available. The union has already publicly warned that industrial action is a real possibility if these plans are not withdrawn, and that firefighters are considering "all options" to fight the cuts.

It is important for decision-makers and consultees to understand what this means in practice. In the United Kingdom, any move to strike action requires a formal statutory process, including a lawful ballot and the provision of notices. When a proposal programme creates widespread fear of job loss, forced relocation, and unsafe duty system changes—combined with a perception that consultation is occurring after the decision has effectively been made—it directly increases the likelihood that the workforce will press for precisely that statutory ballot process to begin. This is not the route the union seeks; but it is a foreseeable and rational consequence of an approach that has already produced profound anger and loss of confidence among operational staff.

This dispute risk is also not confined to Oxfordshire alone. Oxfordshire FRS is not operating in a vacuum, and industrial relations pressures do not exist in isolation from the national context in which firefighters are experiencing sustained under-investment, mounting demands, and significant strain on emergency response resilience. When local employers pursue programmes that threaten jobs, capability and conditions of service—especially through processes perceived as bypassing negotiated standards—those disputes can and do escalate beyond local boundaries, drawing in regional and national union structures and potentially

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contributing to wider industrial momentum. Oxfordshire should not assume that the consequences of this programme will remain neatly contained. It is precisely for this reason that the union has already placed on record that failing agreement risks escalation through the formal industrial relations machinery.

For the avoidance of doubt, the existence of this dispute trajectory is not being stated as an attempt to "pressure" the consultation outcome; it is being recorded as a material impact arising from the way the proposals have been handled and the severity of what is being proposed. A consultation that destabilises industrial relations at scale risks harming workforce retention, undermining morale, increasing sickness and turnover, and damaging operational delivery long before any implementation date is reached. The County Council and senior officers therefore have a responsibility—today, during the consultation period—to prevent escalation by withdrawing these proposals, abandoning the approach of unilateral publication, and committing to genuine negotiated development of alternatives that protect public safety and firefighter welfare.

What "meaningful consultation" requires and why this consultation does not meet it

A lawful and fair consultation must enable respondents to make an intelligent response. For a cover model that affects survival, firefighter safety and public risk, that requires: a transparent statement of the problem being solved; disclosure of the evidence base; clear comparison of all credible options including a non-reduction option; identification of all impacts (including equality and health and safety); adequate time and accessible information; and a genuine willingness to change course in light of what is heard.

The material provided does not meet that standard. Some of the most consequential assumptions are embedded in technical modelling documents that most residents will never read, and which are not presented in plain language alongside the consultation narrative. Where technical material is provided, it is difficult to interpret without specialist knowledge, and does not clearly disclose how assumptions shape results. Where workforce consequences are acknowledged (redundancy risk; changes to crewing; duty systems), they are presented in HR communications and FAQs that stress support rather than dealing with the substantive risk. Where equality impacts are identified, the analysis does not deepen as required when an adverse impact is admitted. In those circumstances, the consultation cannot be said to provide the public and the workforce with a fair opportunity to understand what is being proposed, to test the justifications, and to suggest safer alternatives.

Public safety: why response time averages are not a sufficient measure

The Services materials focus heavily on response performance, often presented as mean response times or performance curves. The union does not deny the relevance of response time; early intervention matters. However, a public safety system cannot be designed by chasing a single metric, especially an average. There are at least five reasons.

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First, averages conceal extremes. Fire deaths, serious injuries and firefighter near-misses often occur in the tail of the distribution: the slower responses, the concurrent incidents, the incidents where resources are already committed and cover moves across the county. A plan that improves the mean while increasing the tail is a plan that can still kill.

Second, response time is only one component of outcome. What matters is effective intervention: adequately crewed appliances arriving with the right skills, equipment and command capability, at the right time. Reducing crewing, diluting specialist capability, and removing stations can degrade effectiveness even if an algorithmic average looks acceptable.

Third, the system must cope with concurrency and escalation. A county will experience multiple incidents simultaneously, and a single “high demand” period can generate overlapping mobilisations. Removing appliances and closing stations reduces surge capacity exactly when it is needed.

Fourth, response performance must be understood alongside prevention, protection and resilience. Many incidents are prevented or mitigated by non-emergency work, and resilience is required for weather events, infrastructure incidents, large fires and complex rescues. The Services own documentation acknowledges increasing pressure and the need for productivity in prevention work, but the workforce reality is that cuts to cover and the destabilisation of duty systems can reduce capacity to deliver these functions.

Fifth, a response model must reflect real operational practice, not an idealised future state that assumes away inconvenient demand or relies on unproven recruitment improvements. A model that presumes enhanced night-time on-call availability while simultaneously closing on-call stations is a model that contradicts itself.

What the modelling report actually shows: Oxford is made worse by design

The modelling report prepared with Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service data states that it uses five years of CAD workload data (April 2019 to March 2024) for demand analysis, two years (April 2022 to March 2024) for response/performance analysis, and availability datasets from Vision and Gartan. It also describes a shift to a “model base position” intended to reflect future operations, including removing wholetime support from despatch logic, removing certain AFA responses in low and medium risk properties, and using Gartan on-call availability data rather than Vision to reflect a position where on-call crews cannot rely on overtime from wholetime staff.

Within that modelling, the “Main Model Option (North Oxford) – Overall” reports improvements in service-wide mean response by incident type. Yet when the same scenario is broken down by local service for primary fires and RTCs, Oxford is shown as worse. In that scenario, the mean first appliance response for Oxford increases from 08:19 to 09:07 (an increase of 00:48) and the mean second appliance response increases from 10:42 to 11:46 (an increase of 01:04). The day-only view similarly shows

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Oxford's first appliance worsening by 00:47 and second appliance worsening by 00:42, while other districts improve substantially. The modelling therefore aligns with the Equalities Impact Assessment's narrative: the design choice is to transfer performance away from Oxford to improve other areas.

The modelling also contains a specific scenario labelled "Main Model Option (Rewley Road) – Night" which shows Oxford's mean first appliance response for primary fires and RTCs worsening from 08:15 to 08:28 (00:13) and its second appliance response worsening from 10:19 to 12:23 (02:04). A two-minute deterioration in the second appliance response to life-risk incidents at night is not a trivial "performance impact"; it is a material reduction in the ability to deliver timely additional personnel, water, BA capability, rescue capability and incident command support at precisely the time when staffing and availability are already constrained.

The union's position is that these modelling outputs, even before any critique of assumptions, are sufficient to reject the proposals. A public authority should not knowingly worsen emergency response in the county's most deprived and diverse district in order to improve performance elsewhere, especially when the change is framed as a "conscious move". That is not "improving" the service. It is re-prioritising risk in a way that will foreseeably harm the communities that already carry the greatest vulnerability.

Why the modelling assumptions cannot justify cuts and closures

The modelling report itself makes clear that the model base position is not the same as validated historical operations. It removes wholetime support from dispatch logic for certain incident types, removes a category of AFA responses, and replaces Vision availability with Gartan to represent a future where overtime support is not relied upon. Each of those steps is an assumption with major consequences, and in combination they change the fundamental operating environment that the model then claims to "optimise".

Removing categories of calls from the model reduces demand and can artificially improve performance metrics, because fewer appliances are committed to low-priority incidents and therefore appear more available. Yet whether and how the service will cease responding to those AFAs is not a neutral technical detail; it is a policy change with potential consequences for risk, for public expectation, and for the broader safety ecosystem. It is not acceptable to use that assumed future demand reduction to justify station closures and appliance removals in the core response model.

Similarly, removing wholetime support from dispatch logic may reflect an aspiration to rely less on wholetime at night, but it is not a risk assessment. Wholetime support exists in dispatch logic for reasons: capability, reliability, and rapid attendance for incidents where delay or under-attendance can be fatal. Changing dispatch logic to suit a reduced-cover model is circular reasoning: the model changes the rules to make the reduced-cover option look workable, then claims the results prove the option is safe.

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The same circularity arises in the portrayal of on-call availability. The staff briefing summary says that daytime availability is lowest when demand is highest and that the service relies heavily on overtime and additional hours, described as costly and unsustainable. That is an argument for investment and stable staffing, not for cutting stations. The correct response to an availability gap is to fix the capacity problem—through recruitment, retention, better employment arrangements, and central government funding—not to close stations and remove appliances, thereby reducing the system's ability to respond when the gap inevitably persists.

Finally, the modelling approach is not a substitute for operational judgement. A sophisticated travel time calibration does not account for all real incident factors: traffic anomalies, roadworks, weather, event-related congestion, crew fatigue, training levels, command complexity, and the unpredictable distribution of concurrent calls. If the modelling already shows Oxford's response worsening, those real-world factors are likely to make the lived impact worse still.

Night-time cover and the move to on-call dependence

A central feature of the proposals is to reduce the use of wholetime firefighters at night and instead increase their use during the day, relying more on on-call at night because night availability is described as "very good". On paper this might look attractive: redeploy fixed costs to match daytime demand while depending on a traditionally stronger on-call night pattern.

In practice, the proposal is a high-risk bet. It concentrates risk in three ways. It increases the consequences of any on-call shortfall because fewer wholetime resources are guaranteed at night. It increases the potential for concurrent incident failure because fewer appliances are in fixed availability. And it increases fatigue and safety risk because on-call members, who already juggle work and home commitments, become even more critical to the system's integrity at night.

The union's concern is intensified by the efficiency proposal to close up to three on-call stations (Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock) and by the prospect of redundancies among on-call employees unless they can transfer. It is internally inconsistent to argue that the future model relies on strong night on-call availability while proposing actions that will remove stations, displace crews, reduce support, and trigger redundancy risk. On-call viability depends on stability, community links, local employer relationships, and the lived feasibility of responding from home or work. Closing stations and forcing transfers undermines those foundations.

Moreover, the services own internal documentation acknowledges the mismatch between "actual" on-call availability (Gartan) and "enhanced" availability (Vision) that includes overtime by wholetime staff. The workforce has kept the system afloat through additional hours. That is not a reason to restructure and cut; it is evidence that the county is already running at the edge of capacity.

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On-call station closures: Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock

The closure of on-call stations is presented as a response to “perennially poor” availability. The union does not deny the reality of on-call challenges; we have raised retention and recruitment pressures for years, and the service’s own culture roadshow material records the strain on on-call members and their difficulty keeping up with internal communications. However, closure is not a solution; it is an admission of failure to support a system that is vital to Oxfordshire’s resilience.

Closing Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock removes emergency response bases that serve distinct communities, with distinct road networks, risk profiles, and incident patterns. It also removes a visible prevention and reassurance presence, and it breaks the local relationships that are essential for on-call recruitment. Once a station is closed, rebuilding that local system is extremely difficult. The effect is not just longer travel time; it is a reduced ability to generate local turnout, to support local employers, and to maintain skilled, experienced crews embedded in their areas.

The closure proposal also undermines the services stated aim of improving daytime availability while relying on on-call at night. The most sustainable on-call systems are those with a stable base, consistent support, and a credible operational role. Proposing closure sends the opposite message: that on-call is expendable when inconvenient, rather than an essential component to be invested in. That message will harm recruitment across the county, not only at the stations listed for closure.

In addition, the equality dimension must be addressed. Rural communities include older populations, isolated dwellings, and travel distances that can make outcomes highly sensitive to response delays. Urban communities in Oxford include high-density housing, HMOs, student accommodation and diverse populations. A safe county model must avoid trading one set of vulnerabilities against another. The proposal does exactly that: it attempts to improve rural averages by degrading Oxford and by closing rural on-call stations, then relies on the remainder of the on-call system to cover more ground. That is not resilience; it is fragility.

Removing the second appliance from Thame

The removal of a second appliance from Thame is presented as an efficiency measure. The union’s view is that it is an unacceptable reduction in capacity that will have immediate and foreseeable operational consequences. A second appliance provides the ability to mount effective initial attack, to sustain BA operations, to provide additional pumps for water, and to manage multiple simultaneous calls. It is also critical for the reality of Oxfordshire geography: travel times, major roads, and the distribution of towns and villages mean that a second pump in the right place can be the difference between a controlled incident and a major incident.

Removing a second appliance also increases pressure on neighbouring stations to provide reinforcement, which in turn increases the likelihood that those stations are unavailable for their own areas. This is how cover collapses in practice: a cut in one place does not stay local; it ripples across the mobilisation plan. The modelling

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approach, particularly if it assumes demand reductions and altered dispatch rules, cannot fully capture this ripple effect in a live operational environment.

The consultation documents also place this proposal within a wider set of changes, including station closures and changes to Oxford cover. The combined effect is a county-wide thinning of capacity. In that context, removing a second appliance at Thame is not an isolated efficiency; it is part of a package that reduces the system's ability to withstand stress.

Rewley Road, Kidlington and the removal of city-centre cover

The proposals involve removing the on-call pump from Rewley Road and creating a new station toward the north of Oxford combining Rewley Road and Kidlington. The public materials and union campaign materials describe this as removing fire engines from Oxford's historic city centre and merging established bases. The union agrees with that characterisation: regardless of how a new build is described, removing a base from the city centre changes travel time, route options, and immediate intervention potential for a dense, complex risk environment.

Oxford city centre presents unique operational challenges: narrow streets, heritage buildings, high footfall, mixed occupancy, and significant life risk. It also presents traffic constraints and event-related congestion. A response base proximate to the centre provides not only faster attendance but also local knowledge and operational familiarity that improves effectiveness. Moving that base north is a degradation of capability in the heart of the county's most complex risk area.

The modelling results reinforce this concern. The scenario testing changes associated with Rewley Road at night shows Oxford's second appliance response to primary fires and RTCs worsening by over two minutes. The union considers that a serious warning sign: it indicates that the removal of a key Oxford resource, even within a model that assumes demand reductions and altered dispatch, produces a measurable deterioration in the ability to deliver the second appliance. In the real world, that second appliance is often the difference between sustainable BA rotations and unsafe operations, between a rescued casualty and a delayed rescue, and between a controlled incident and rapid escalation.

We also note the workforce dimension that has been communicated publicly: that firefighters in Kidlington face losing homes as a result of the Oxford station changes. The HR and staff materials indicate that significant establishment changes and relocations are anticipated, including moving wholetime positions from Kidlington to enable day-shift systems elsewhere. Where service accommodation is involved, it must address this openly: the risk of housing loss is not a side issue; it is a material workforce impact that affects retention, recruitment and morale.

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Specialist rescue capability and the proposal to disband the Kidlington specialist rescue unit

The proposals include reallocating specialist rescue capability among more stations and disbanding the specialist rescue unit at Kidlington. Union materials describe this as cutting a specialist rescue vehicle, including a rescue tender. Whatever language is used, the substance is clear: specialist capability is being diluted and centralised capability at Kidlington is being reduced or removed.

Specialist rescue is not a discretionary add-on; it is an essential component of modern fire and rescue. Oxfordshire faces road traffic collisions, water and flood risk, industrial and infrastructure incidents, and complex rescues in urban and rural settings. Specialist rescue units provide trained personnel, equipment, and coordinated capability that cannot be replicated simply by spreading limited kit thinly across stations. A unit provides readiness, depth of skill, training continuity, and the ability to scale quickly.

Disbanding a specialist unit while simultaneously reducing stations and appliances is an attack on resilience. It reduces the county's ability to deal with low-probability, high-impact events, and it increases the risk that specialist skills will become degraded through insufficient use and training. The service cannot substitute this with aspirational language about "reallocation" unless it commits, in detail, to equivalent staffing, training time, equipment standards, and guaranteed availability. No such binding commitments have been provided.

The consultation should also acknowledge the national context that the union has raised: extreme weather events and rising operational demands. Wildfire pressure, flooding, and climate-related incidents require capacity and specialist skills, not less. Cutting or diluting rescue capability in this context is strategically backward.

Crewing, crew sizes, and the unacceptable idea of reducing normal crewing to four

The Group 1 staff briefing summary raises an issue that goes to the heart of firefighter and public safety. It states that if day-shift options proceed and watch establishments are reduced, management is considering two ways to manage the reduction: either reduce normal crewing on fire engines to four persons, or impose new annual leave arrangements that restrict leave so that five-person crewing can be maintained.

The union's position is clear. Reducing normal crewing to four is unsafe. It undermines the ability to deliver simultaneous tasks on arrival, delays the establishment of water supplies, delays BA entry, reduces immediate casualty handling capability, and increases individual workload and risk. It also reduces the robustness of incident command and the ability to manage dynamic risk assessments. In fire conditions where seconds matter and where the environment is rapidly deteriorating, a four-person crew is not a marginal change; it is a fundamental reduction in operational capability.

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The alternative presented—restricting annual leave to maintain five-person crewing—also has serious consequences. It places the burden of reduced establishment on the workforce by limiting rest and family life, increasing fatigue, and eroding goodwill. Both "solutions" point to the same underlying truth: the proposed model does not have sufficient staffing to deliver safe, sustainable cover without compromising either crewing or rest. That is the definition of an unsafe model.

The appropriate response is not to force an unsafe crewing standard or to restrict leave; it is to abandon the reductions that create the staffing gap and to pursue investment and recruitment strategies that maintain safe crewing and wellbeing.

Duty systems, fatigue and the risks of 12-hour shift proposals

The union has stated publicly and in formal correspondence that it will not accept any move to 12-hour shifts. Union campaign materials warn that crews would be forced to work unsafe 12-hour shifts, and that this is part of the attack on working conditions. While the public consultation materials do not always set out shift patterns in detail, the workforce briefings and HR materials make clear that new day-shift duty systems are central to the model and that wider staffing and crewing changes are being considered.

In a safety-critical service, duty system design is a core health and safety issue. Fatigue impairs performance, decision-making and reaction time. It increases accident risk and increases the risk of errors in high-hazard environments. The union's critique of the Equalities Impact Assessment highlights that the EIA introduces a shift-pattern change without applying established UK health and safety guidance on fatigue and shift work, including guidance that warns against long shifts and requires a thorough fatigue risk assessment.

The service must not treat duty system changes as a staffing mechanism detached from safety. Any proposal that increases shift length, intensifies work, or reduces recovery time must be justified with a robust, evidence-based fatigue risk assessment that covers the full duty cycle, including post-shift travel (an identified risk route), training demands, and secondary employment pressures that are common in on-call and mixed systems. That level of analysis has not been provided to consultation respondents. In its absence, it is not credible to claim that the model "improves safety" while simultaneously pushing the workforce toward more fatigue-inducing patterns and reduced crewing.

Redundancy risk, relocation and workforce stability

The Staff FAQ explicitly states that the proposed changes could potentially result in some on-call employees being made redundant unless they are able to transfer to other fire stations, which the council says would be its preferred outcome. It also outlines that if redundancies arise, the council will seek to minimise redundancies by considering suitable alternative roles. This is a significant admission. In an emergency service already facing on-call shortages and recruitment challenges, proposals that create redundancy risk are inherently contradictory. They remove experienced people,

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destabilise availability, and discourage prospective recruits who see the role as insecure.

The HR letter and staff FAQ also indicate that establishment positions would be relocated from Kidlington to enable day-shift duty systems at other stations. Relocation is not a mere administrative change; it affects commuting, family life, local knowledge, and retention. The union's press materials further highlight that members may lose their homes in Kidlington as a direct consequence of the Oxford proposals. Such impacts are corrosive to morale and recruitment and must be treated as a central issue, not a footnote.

The services' HR messaging emphasises support, including signposting to wellbeing services and resilience training. Support is welcome, but it cannot be used to normalise harmful change. The correct approach is to prevent foreseeable harm by withdrawing unsafe proposals, not to offer counselling while proceeding with them.

Equality and the admitted detriment to Oxford City

The Equalities Impact Assessment (dated 28 October 2025) makes several statements that are directly relevant to the legality and ethics of this proposal. It identifies that Oxford City is the county's most deprived district (referencing IMD 2019) and that the proportion of residents who are not "White British" is greatest in Oxford at 46.5% (and lowest in West Oxfordshire at 11%). These are not incidental facts; they indicate that Oxford contains a larger proportion of people who are more likely to experience disadvantage and more likely to share protected characteristics.

The EIA then states that, while first appliance response improvements are forecast during the day in four of the five local council areas, the performance in Oxford City is forecast to be "slightly worse" under the options being put forward. It describes this as a "conscious move" to transfer resources to less densely populated rural areas that suffer from poor on-call availability to ensure greater parity across the county. It also states that despite this reduction, response performance is forecast to remain between around 1% and 12% better in Oxford City than other parts of the county overall, due to Oxford's risk profile and the proposal to keep resources higher for Oxford compared to other parts.

The union's response is that the existence of a relative advantage compared to other districts does not justify making Oxford worse. Equality law and public ethics do not permit an service to knowingly worsen emergency response for the most deprived and diverse area because others will still be worse. The duty is to have due regard to eliminating discrimination and advancing equality of opportunity. If an adverse impact is identified for the communities most likely to include protected groups, the service must show the depth of analysis and mitigation expected in such circumstances. Simply asserting "parity" is not sufficient, and it is not a lawful substitute for a proper equality analysis and a genuine exploration of less harmful alternatives.

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Why the Equalities Impact Assessment is inadequate

The union's detailed critique of the EIA explains why it fails to meet the standard expected under the Public Sector Equality Duty. The EIA does not clearly structure its analysis around the three statutory aims of the PSED. It frames the decision primarily as a geographic parity exercise rather than an assessment of impacts on people who share protected characteristics. It acknowledges an adverse effect in Oxford, then fails to deepen its analysis accordingly. It does not disaggregate the impact sufficiently, does not clearly show consideration of less disadvantageous alternatives, and risks treating county-level benefits as a justification for area-level detriment in a way that equality guidance warns against.

The EIA also fails to integrate the health and safety dimension of duty system changes. In a safety-critical environment, changes that increase fatigue risk can have disproportionate effects on particular groups, including older workers, workers with certain health conditions, carers, and those with longer commutes. An equality assessment that does not incorporate fatigue risk assessment is incomplete.

An adequate EIA would not only describe demographic facts and general mitigations; it would demonstrate, with specificity, how the service has tested alternatives, how it will prevent worsening service for Oxford's deprived communities, how it will ensure that duty system changes do not create disproportionate detriment, and how it will monitor and correct impacts in real time. None of this is provided in a way that enables confidence in the proposals.

Culture, trust and the ability of the organisation to manage change safely

A major contextual factor is the organisation's own culture evidence. The culture roadshow material records persistent staff concerns: lack of clarity on decision-making forums; information overload; duplication of key messages; difficulty identifying priorities; and the reality that on-call members cannot keep up to date. It also records a lack of genuine employee engagement in key initiatives, explicitly listing initiatives such as Botley Road (Eynsham staff), Rewley Road, rescue tender, direct entry, and 5-to-4 crews. It describes weak feedback loops and a sense that concerns are raised but not acted upon.

This context matters because organisational change in emergency services is not only a technical exercise. It depends on trust, willingness to cooperate, learning culture, and the ability to identify and correct risk. A model that reduces cover and increases reliance on on-call at night requires a high-trust environment and a robust learning culture, because any shortfall will have immediate safety consequences. Implementing such a model amid documented concerns about engagement and feedback is irresponsible.

The union therefore considers that the proposals are not only unsafe in substance; they are unsafe in context. The service has not demonstrated that it has the culture, engagement infrastructure and trust required to safely implement a system-wide

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reconfiguration that depends on the workforce absorbing disruption while maintaining performance.

The so-called “investment options” do not cure the core problem

The consultation materials present investment options: funding uplift to maintain an additional 24/7 fire engine for Oxford (by uplifting the proposed day shift engine at the new north Oxford station), maintaining watch establishments at current levels, and retaining Station Support Officers. These are presented as things that might be enabled by increased revenue.

The union’s position is that these should not be framed as optional extras; they are the baseline requirements of a safe service. “Maintaining establishment levels” is not an investment luxury; it is the minimum needed to avoid unsafe crewing and restricted leave. Retaining Station Support Officers is not a discretionary add-on; it is essential support for on-call stability, especially if the service intends to rely more on on-call at night. Maintaining additional Oxford cover is not an enhancement; it is mitigation for the admitted detriment to Oxford performance.

The way the options are presented also raises a governance concern: the service appears to be consulting on a cut model while dangling investment as a conditional alternative. That approach risks creating a false choice and obscures the reality that the safest option is to withdraw the cuts entirely and pursue funding and workforce solutions. If the service believes investment is needed, it should make the investment case openly and lead with it, not use it to soften or legitimise reductions.

What should happen instead: a safe, evidence-led alternative

The union is not simply saying “no” without proposing a path forward. A safe alternative begins with an honest diagnosis: Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue has been operating under resource pressure, with daytime availability challenges, reliance on overtime and additional hours, and recruitment/retention issues particularly affecting on-call. The appropriate response is to invest and stabilise, not to cut and destabilise.

A safe plan would prioritise: protecting existing stations and appliances; improving on-call sustainability through better support, improved employment arrangements, employer engagement, and guaranteed training/progression; expanding wholetime capacity where risk justifies it; investing in prevention and protection with adequate staffing; retaining specialist rescue capability with clear minimum standards; and improving performance through targeted improvements rather than systemic reductions.

Such a plan must be co-produced with the workforce and the representative unions at a formative stage, with transparent data, shared problem definition, and independent facilitation where needed. It must include a fully worked non-reduction option, and it must treat equality and health and safety not as annexes but as core decision criteria.

The union is ready to engage on this basis. We cannot accept, and will continue to oppose, a pathway that starts with station closures, appliance removals and reduced

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guaranteed cover and then asks the public to choose how much harm they are willing to tolerate.

Conclusion and formal demand

For the reasons set out in this submission, Oxfordshire Fire Brigades Union issues an unequivocal rejection of these proposals and demands that Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service and Oxfordshire County Council **withdraw them in full and without delay**. There is no mandate—operational, ethical, or legal—for a programme that closes stations, removes appliances, reduces guaranteed cover, dilutes specialist capability, and threatens jobs and conditions while knowingly worsening service provision for Oxford. These proposals are not capable of being made "safe" through minor amendments, mitigations, or phased implementation. They must be abandoned.

Oxfordshire FBU is setting out clear red lines. **There will be no acceptance of station closures or mergers that remove established local response capacity; no acceptance of appliance removals or reductions in resilient pumping capability; no acceptance of any reduction in safe crewing standards, including any move toward four-person crewing; no acceptance of imposed duty system changes that increase fatigue risk, including any move to 12-hour shifts; no acceptance of the disbanding or dilution of specialist rescue capability; and no acceptance of redundancies, displacement, or the use of job insecurity to force through a cover model that endangers the public and firefighters.** These are matters of life safety, not negotiable "efficiency measures".

The service must also be under no illusion about consequence. If decision-makers continue to pursue this programme—whether by attempting to "push through" implementation after the consultation, or by repackaging the same reductions under a different name—the union will respond accordingly. Oxfordshire firefighters will not be used to deliver managed decline, and the FBU will take every lawful step necessary to defend public safety, firefighter safety, and our members' jobs and conditions.

The FBU's duty is to the public and to our members. We will oppose these cuts at every stage and by every lawful means available. **Cuts kill**—and in fire and rescue that is not rhetoric. It is the reality of what happens when emergency response capacity is removed and risk is shifted onto communities and frontline.

This Document has been put together by Region 12 Officials and Oxfordshire FBU Executive Committee

Appendix: documents reviewed and how they inform this submission

This submission is grounded in the services' consultation and workforce materials and in union documents produced in response. The key documents reviewed include: the HR letter to staff about the cover model consultation (dated 24 October 2025) outlining the effectiveness, efficiency and investment themes and listing specific proposals and investment options; the Staff FAQ (version 1) describing the rationale for day-shift redeployment and reliance on night on-call, and acknowledging potential redundancy

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risk for on-call employees; the Group 1 briefing summary (22 October 2025) setting out the core and additional proposals and explicitly raising the possibility of reducing normal crewing to four or restricting annual leave; the internal briefing slides (22 October 2025) outlining the modelling methodology and option summary; the "Improve our fire and rescue service" Equalities Impact Assessment (dated 28 October 2025) admitting a forecast deterioration for Oxford City as a conscious move to transfer resources; the union's detailed report critiquing the EIA for PSED and fatigue assessment failures; the ORH modelling report setting out demand, availability and response modelling assumptions and scenario outputs including Oxford performance impacts; the culture roadshow document recording staff concerns about engagement and decision-making; and union campaign and communications materials including the public "Cuts Kill" leaflet and the press release about the county-wide mass meeting and rally.

Taken together, these documents show a consistent pattern: the proposals reduce stations and appliances; they rely more heavily on on-call at night while destabilising the on-call system; they risk unsafe crewing and fatigue; they admit harm to Oxford City; and they are being advanced in a context of low trust and documented cultural concerns. That combination is why the union rejects the proposals and calls for withdrawal and replacement with an investment-led, collaboratively developed plan.

Appendix 1

Report: Critique of the "Improving our fire and rescue service – Equalities Impact Assessment"

Purpose of this report

This report examines the Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) dated 28 October 2025 for the proposal to "improve our fire and rescue service." It tests that EIA against the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and against current UK safety guidance on shift work and fatigue.

The key problem is simple: the EIA openly admits that Oxford — the county's most deprived and most diverse area — will get a slightly worse service, but it does not then do the deeper, more specific equality work that UK law expects once such an adverse effect is identified. At the same time, it introduces a shift-pattern change in a safety-critical service without applying well-known UK guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Health Services Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) on fatigue and long shifts. That combination makes the EIA procedurally weak and substantively incomplete.

UK legal and guidance backdrop

Equality Act 2010, section 149

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The council/fire service must, when making decisions, have due regard to the need to:

1. eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct;
2. advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
3. foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

EHRC technical guidance on the PSED (England) makes clear that:

- the regard must be conscious and contemporaneous (i.e. visible at the time of decision);
- the depth of analysis must increase where an adverse impact is identified;
- authorities must consider less disadvantageous options where they know a disadvantage will occur;
- you cannot "average out" a detriment to one group or area by pointing to benefits elsewhere.

HSE guidance on shift work and fatigue (notably "Managing shift work: Health and safety guidance (HSG256)" and HSE's "Fatigue" pages) says that employers must assess proposed shift systems because long or poorly designed shifts increase fatigue, and fatigue increases accidents, injuries and ill-health, particularly in dangerous or safety-critical work. HSE is explicit that shifts should ordinarily be limited to 12 hours and to shorter periods where the work is demanding or risky — which firefighting clearly is.

HSSIB report on the impact of staff fatigue on safety (2025) confirms that long or intensive shifts are still being implemented without adequate recognition of fatigue as a safety risk and that post-shift driving is a real route to harm.

Together, these set the standard: if you worsen a service for the area most likely to contain protected groups, you show your equality working; and if you change shifts in a safety-critical service, you show your fatigue working.

The proposal and what the EIA says

The EIA relates to a package of service changes including:

- introducing day-shift wholetime systems at five stations that previously relied on on-call cover;
- creating a new station in north Oxford and merging Rewley Road and Kidlington;
- closing up to three on-call stations with "very poor availability";
- removing the second appliance at Thame;
- and redistributing resources so that daytime availability across the county is improved.

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Crucially, the EIA says this is a “conscious move” to improve response for rural or less densely populated areas and that, as a result, response in Oxford — described in the same document as the most deprived and most diverse district — will be “slightly worse.”

That is the starting point for all of the criticism below.

Equality-sensitive facts the EIA itself identifies

- Oxford is the county’s most deprived district (IMD 2019).
- Oxford has the highest proportion of non-White British residents (around 46.5%).
- The new model will make Oxford’s service “slightly worse,” while improving service elsewhere.

In other words: the impact falls where deprivation and diversity are highest. That is precisely when the PSED requires a fuller, not thinner, analysis.

Systematic failures

Framing and core-duty failures

No explicit PSED structure.

The EIA never presents its analysis under the three PSED aims. It talks about “parity of response performance” instead of eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations. That is an operational frame, not the statutory frame.

Geography treated as equality.

The EIA justifies the proposal as a “conscious move” to transfer resources to rural areas to create parity, while acknowledging Oxford will be slightly worse. That is not what the PSED asks. The duty is to consider people with protected characteristics, not to make the map look fairer.

No increase in rigour once harm is admitted.

Once the EIA says Oxford’s deprived communities will do worse, it should immediately step up: more data, more disaggregation, more explanation. It does not. It continues at a general, county-level narrative.

Improper offsetting logic.

The EIA effectively says: “yes, Oxford is a bit worse, but everywhere else is better, so overall this is fair.” The PSED does not permit a detriment to one group or area to be washed away by improvements to others. Each affected group needs to be considered in its own right.

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Failures to identify who is affected

5. **No quantification of the worsened Oxford group.**
   The EIA never says how many residents, how many high-risk households, or how many minority ethnic or disabled people are in the Oxford postcodes that will see a deterioration. Without scale, you cannot show you had due regard to the extent of the disadvantage.
6. **Race impact dismissed on the wrong basis.**
   The EIA notes Oxford is far more diverse, then says ethnicity is not itself a fire-risk factor and concludes there is no specific adverse race impact. That is the wrong test. The right test is whether the decision falls more heavily on a more diverse area. Here, it plainly does.
7. **Disability impact minimised despite Oxford's higher figure.**
   The EIA notes that disabled people face higher fire-death risks and also notes that Oxford has the county's highest proportion of people whose daily activities are limited a lot. It then concludes the model "does not have an overall impact." If you worsen service in the very place with the most disabled people, you need to explain why that is acceptable. The EIA does not.
8. **National risk factors not applied locally.**
   The EIA lists national risk factors (older age, disability, low income, single parents, larger families). It never carries out the obvious step: "are those people concentrated in the Oxford areas we are about to make worse?"

Alternatives and proportionality failures

9. **Declared absence of alternatives.**
   The EIA states that no stand-alone alternative models were fully developed and effectively presents the choice as "do this or do nothing." When you already know your proposal harms the most deprived and most diverse area, you must be able to show you considered less harmful variants. The EIA says it did not.
10. **Cost allowed to displace equality without being recorded.**
    The EIA stresses doing this within the current cost envelope and treats the deterioration in Oxford as an outcome of that. That is permissible only if the authority records that it has weighed cost against equality. There is no such recorded weighing.

Protected-characteristics table failures

11. **Unsupported "no impact" entries.**
    Characteristics such as gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership are simply marked "no impact" without any reasoning. Because the proposals change where and when cover is available, these "no impact" entries look like form-filling, not genuine consideration.
12. **Religion/belief treated as just a headcount.**
    The EIA lists religious populations but does not examine whether changing Oxford's service — the place with the most non-Christian places of worship — affects outreach, reassurance or access for those groups.

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13. **Age analysis inconsistent with the EIA's own risk narrative.**
    Elsewhere the EIA notes that older people and some children are higher fire-risk groups. In the table it says age is broadly similar, so there is no impact. Those two statements can't both be right.

Consultation and engagement failures

14. **Consultation is generic, not targeted.**
    The EIA merely says the proposals will be consulted on, without saying the consultation will reach the deprived, diverse and more disabled communities in Oxford that it has identified as taking the hit. That is a procedural gap.
15. **No accessibility or outreach detail.**
    There is no mention of non-digital routes, accessible formats, or engagement through Oxford's minority-faith sites, even though those are mentioned elsewhere. Once the EIA has identified who will be worse off, it should say how their views will be obtained. It does not.

Monitoring and review failures

16. **Empty review promise.**
    The EIA says there is a need for regular review and that the proposal can be adapted. It does not say when, by whom, or on what indicators. Because the PSED is a continuing duty, such vagueness does not demonstrate compliance.
17. **No equality-sensitive indicators.**
    There is no commitment to monitor response times or incident outcomes in the specific Oxford areas that are most deprived, nor for older or disabled residents there. Without equality-sensitive metrics, "we will review" is effectively meaningless.

Evidence-handling failures

18. **Use of dated deprivation data with no refresh.**
    The EIA relies on IMD 2019 to justify a 2025 redistribution that makes Oxford worse off. If deprivation is the whole reason for identifying Oxford as sensitive, the EIA should at least say it will refresh the evidence at consultation or implementation.
19. **Data cited but not applied.**
    The EIA lists population, religion and disability data but does not actually apply them to the concrete proposals. That is "we have data" rather than "we used data."

Employer/staff-side equality failures

20. **Only the upside of day-shift roles is recorded.**
    The EIA says that creating new day-shift opportunities will be welcomed and will reduce the pressure on on-call crews. It does not record that longer or more intensive daytime work can disadvantage older firefighters, disabled firefighters,

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pregnant firefighters or firefighters with caring responsibilities — all protected characteristics.

21. **No analysis of the workforce in the affected stations.**
    The proposal names particular stations, but the EIA never asks whether those stations have a workforce profile (for example, more women in particular roles) that would make the change disproportionately harmful.

RTC/safety misclassification

22. **Fatigue-related routes to harm ignored.**
    The EIA says road traffic collision risk is driven by road environment, so the proposal has no adverse equality impact there. Once you change to longer or more intensive day shifts, UK guidance (HSE, HSSIB) says fatigue and post-shift driving become risks. That route to harm is missing from the EIA.

Shift-work and fatigue: what should have been in the EIA

The proposal clearly changes when wholetime firefighters are used. That is a shift-system change, and current UK guidance is unequivocal:

- HSE's "Managing shift work" (HSG256) says employers must assess shift systems, use tools such as fatigue and risk indices, limit long shifts, and shorten shifts for demanding or safety-critical work.
- HSE's "Fatigue" guidance says fatigue leads to errors, accidents and ill-health and must be managed like any other risk.
- HSSIB's 2025 investigation into staff fatigue confirms UK organisations still under-recognise fatigue, particularly its link to post-shift road accidents.

The EIA has none of this. From a PSED perspective, that causes five more failures:

23. **Non-identification of a UK-recognised safety risk.**
    In 2025, any UK emergency-service employer changing shifts should be able to show they considered HSE/HSSIB fatigue guidance. The EIA does not identify fatigue at all.
24. **No differential impact for older or disabled firefighters.**
    UK guidance is clear that fatigue affects people differently and that age and health matter. The EIA does not even raise this, so it cannot show due regard to older or disabled staff.
25. **No gender/pregnancy/caring analysis.**
    Longer, more intense day shifts reduce recovery time and make childcare harder — a known gendered impact in UK 24/7 services. Yet the EIA records pregnancy/maternity as "no impact."
26. **No recognition of cumulative health burden in a high-load occupation.**
    Firefighters already carry a heavy physical and sometimes cardiometabolic load. Adding longer day shifts without acknowledging this is an identification failure.
27. **No fatigue-risk monitoring.**
    The EIA's review section does not include fatigue, injuries or near misses, even though those are the obvious metrics once longer day shifts are introduced.

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Overall conclusion

The service has explicitly identified that the only area to get a worse service is Oxford – the county's most deprived and most diverse district – and then failed to carry out the heightened Public Sector Equality Duty analysis that UK law requires in exactly that situation. That is a conscious recognition of adverse impact, followed by an absence of the work that should have followed.

At the same time, it proposes altering shift patterns in a safety-critical, front-line service in 2025 without engaging with HSE and HSSIB material on fatigue, long shifts and post-shift accident risk. That is not just an incomplete assessment; it is a decision taken in disregard of current, domestic safety guidance.

It has declared "no impact" for a number of protected characteristics without setting out any credible reasoning, despite the fact that the change affects where and when emergency cover is physically available.

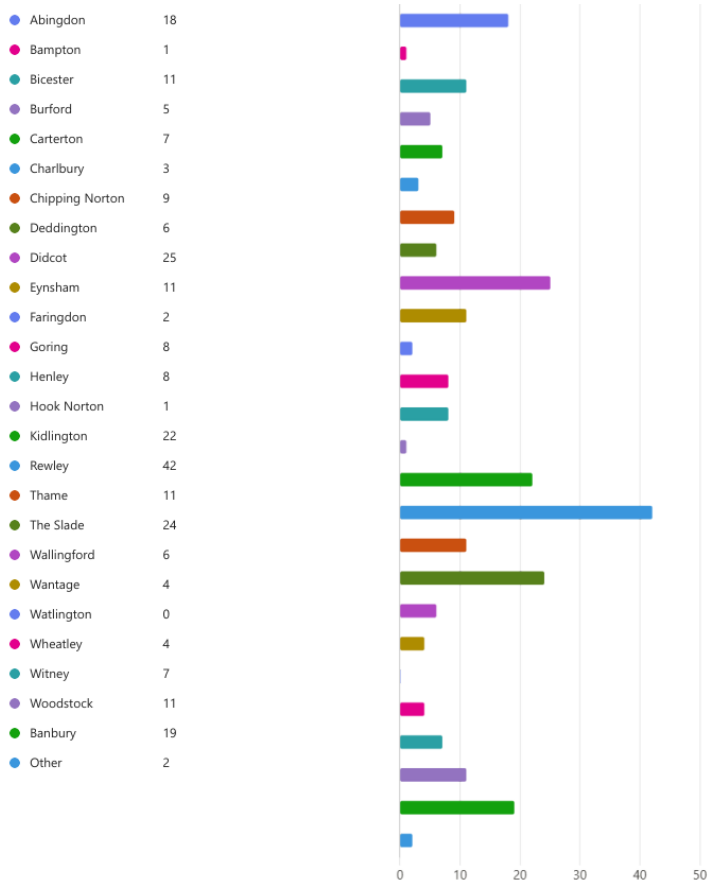
It has offered "review" but without dates, measures or equality indicators, which means there is, in practice, no review at all.

Taken together, this means that, on the face of the 28/10/2025 EIA, Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service cannot demonstrate that it had due regard to the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty at the point of decision. That is not a presentational flaw or a missing paragraph; it is a substantive failure to apply the UK statutory framework that governs how this proposal should have centred around.

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Appendix B: Oxfordshire FBU Members Survey (05.12.25)

2. Station?



3. Role/Duty System



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4. Do you think the service should prioritise and protect frontline funding before frontline cuts are made?



5. Part of the proposal looks to remove a number of Fire Stations. Do you agree with station closures?



6. Do you believe Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) should invest more in fire stations?



7. The Current proposals include reducing the number of Firefighters. Do you agree that reducing Firefighter numbers makes Firefighters and our communities safer?



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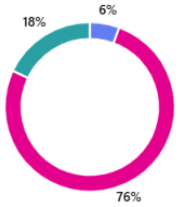
8. The current proposals include reducing the number of fire appliances. Do you believe this will improve the service response to our comm unities and make them safer?

Yes	8
No	237
Undecided	22



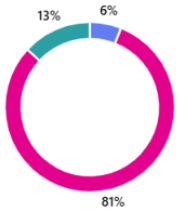
9. Part of the proposals looks to introduce 12-hour shifts. Would you be willing to work a 12-hour duty system as opposed to a standard 2/ 2/4 system?

Yes	15
No	204
Undecided	48



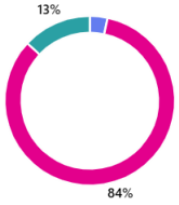
10. Would you support the implementation of a 12-hour (daytime only) duty system at fire stations instead of duty systems that currently pr ovide 24/7 immediately available operational response?

Yes	16
No	216
Undecided	35



11. Would a 12-hour shift be more family friendly for you?

Yes	9
No	223
Undecided	35



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12. Do you think these proposals have properly considered the impact on staff with caring responsibilities (Children, disabled & elderly relatives etc.)?

Yes	10
No	239
Undecided	17



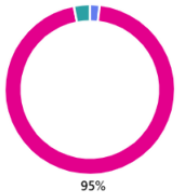
13. The proposal includes reducing the number of firefighters per watch to 6 with one annual leave slot. Do you believe this offers enough resilience to cope with sickness, training and other absences?

Yes	10
No	249
Undecided	8



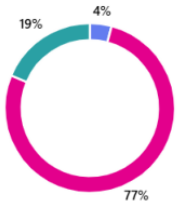
14. Do you believe riding 4 on a wholetime fire appliance provides a safer working platform than riding 5?

Yes	5
No	254
Undecided	8



15. Do you believe removing the specialist rescue appliance at Kidlington would have a positive or negative impact on the service?

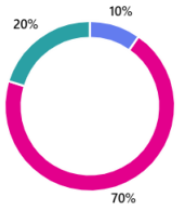
Positive	11
Negative	206
Undecided	50



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16. Do you support the removal of Retained Station Support Officers?

Yes	26
No	187
Undecided	54



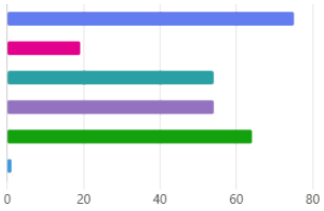
17. Do you support the removal of Wholetime Support backing up retained at incident?

Yes	20
No	220
Undecided	27



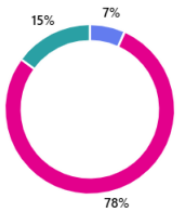
18. If these proposals go through unchanged, which of the following best describes you?

I am likely to leave OFRS alltogether	75
I am likely to leave the retained duty system but stay on OFRS in another role	19
I would stay but will actively look for other roles/services	54
I would stay with no plans to leave	54
Unsure	64
Other	1



19. Do you trust that the service has been open and transparent regarding these proposals?

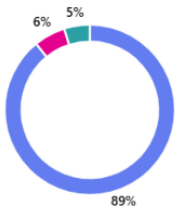
Yes	18
No	209
Undecided	40



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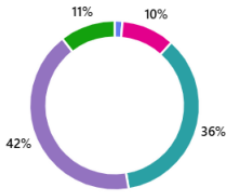
20. Do you think Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service should have reviewed the information that has led to this consultation and shared that information with the Fire Brigades Union before launching a full public consultation?

Yes	238
No	16
Undecided	13



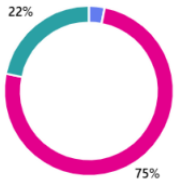
21. Do you have confidence in the data and modeling (e.g. Risk, response times and availability) that underpinned these proposals

Strong confidence	4
Some confidence	27
Little confidence	95
No confidence	112
Unsure	28



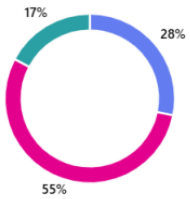
22. Has the services approach to these proposals increased or decreased your trust in senior management?

Increased trust	8
Decreased trust	201
Undecided	58



23. Do you feel able to express your views about these proposals openly without fear of negative consequences towards your career

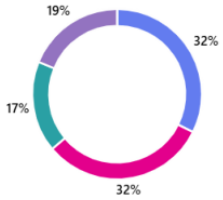
Yes	75
No	145
Undecided	46



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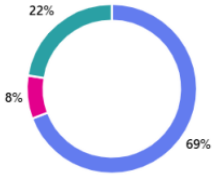
24. Overall, how do you think these proposals will/ or are affecting your health and wellbeing? (Stress, sleep, family life etc.)

Currently/have been affected	86
Huge impact	84
No impact	46
Not thought about it	50



25. Would you support industrial action if OFRS continue to force through these proposals?

Yes	185
No	22
Undecided	60



26. Finally, do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the proposed changes to Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service?

110
Responses

Latest Responses

28 respondents (25%) answered proposals for this question.



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Resident Responses (Anonymised)

1. I completed your consultation last month, but the more I have considered your proposal and reread the information provided, the more it fails to make sense. What I said previously still stands but I would also like to add the following.

   The Proposal acknowledges that most of OFRS's current availability problems have been caused by the lack of on call firefighters yet surprisingly it contains no policies or strategies to address that.

   The Proposal states that closing three fire Stations will only delay times across Oxfordshire by 1 second. That is an extremely misleading and deceptive statement – OFRS managers are fully aware that the three Station areas concerned will have significantly longer attendance times both during the day and even more so at night.

   The Chief Fire Officer said so himself at WODC Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting on the 7th January (minute 39:31) and I quote:

   "There is a recognition that if you have Woodstock Fire Station available and you are in Woodstock and you have an emergency then you will get a better response if the fire engine is available"

   Exactly the same applies to both Eynsham and Henley.

   I feel the report has not been fully transparent and has omitted vital facts and data required for the public, and Councillors, to fully understand its consequences. The ORH Model shows many pages of charts and graphs. There is a full page showing the number of Daily incidents each Fire Station had. A full page showing the Mean Turnout Times of every individual fire appliance. Yet, surprisingly, there is no page or data showing the average Attendance times for each individual Fire Station for the same period.

   A fundamental omission. Particularly since all the future models and scenarios are based on average attendance times (albeit, rather confusingly, lumped together in Districts). How can anyone make an informed decision about the proposal if they are unable to compare the before and after results of the proposal?

   Page 33 of the ORH Report shows that the Eynsham Crew have an extremely good Mean Turnout Time, under 4 minutes, which would imply that their Attendance Times on their station ground will be equally impressive. I strongly suspect that Eynsham's attendance times would be significantly faster than the best case Oxfordshire average of 12:41 minutes as stated in the proposal (primary fire).

   It just makes no sense whatsoever to close Eynsham Fire Station, it did have a dip in availability caused by several long serving on call firefighters retiring just

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before the period used for this Proposal. Previously it had won awards for 100% attendance. I believe that things have significantly improved since this model period and will continue to improve if OFRS invest more into on call Recruitment and Retention.

New offices and an industrial estate is nearing completion literally across the road from Eynsham Fire station and thousands of new adult residents are expected with the Salt Cross development (2 minutes away from the Station), which will enable further recruitment opportunities well into the future.

Witney seem to be performing very well with their on call crews already – (which is another fact acknowledged by the Chief in the WODC Meeting of 7th January).

Is a whole time day shift there really justified for just 1 call every two days (according to your own statistics).

The introduction of a whole-time day crew at Witney will totally upset the current dynamics of the current on call crews and will ultimately negatively affect overall availability. You are effectively asking Witney on call firefighters to still be on call during the day, just in case a second pump is needed, while their first pump is taken out by whole time day crew (which they would have previously been on). It's very demoralising to watch another crew take your shout.

They will also have less hourly (whole time will do all the FP, checks, maintenance etc on station). The result will simply lead to even more fully trained retained firefighters leaving.

OFRS already have the fire stations and fire engines to provide a fantastic service to our community, they just need to invest (both time and money) into on call recruitment and retention. Together with strategies and innovative incentives to encourage and reward employers for releasing their staff.

Disappointingly, a statement made in the Equalities Impact Statement (top of page 5) states: "This will allow local on-call crews to focus recruitment energies on nighttime hours", which suggests that senior management will still be relying on the local on-call stations to manage their own recruitment in the future. Regarding on call recruitment. Currently OFRS's website states that 'there are no current have a go dates' and 'there are no current Women's taster days'. It makes no sense. Pleasingly, the proposal does show that, with intervention, on call station availability can be significantly improved. Hook Norton's availability increased by a massive 25% – although I am unsure why similar levels of 'interventions' weren't applied to all the other on-call Stations across the county. Surely Eynsham residents and businesses are as important as Hook Norton ones (after all we pay the same taxes). This intervention should continue for ALL on call stations, not just the select few, and on call recruitment and retention should be prioritised. Your own new proposal is reliant on on-call crews at every station across the County yet your proposals will have a further negative effect on the retention of on-call firefighters (and possibly whole time too). A well

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managed on call fire station will always be significantly cheaper than a day crewed or whole time station. The Chief also stated in his meeting with WODC 7th January stated that if redundancies were made they “were looking into perhaps using them as bank staff to rely on in spate conditions”. Surely if he expects the Service to be so overwhelmed in the future that it will have difficulty coping without ‘bank staff’ then closing stations seems rather short sighted. The model regarding the location of a new fire station is also confusing. It seems to have been done backwards. Surely it would be more sensible to use a computer model to evaluate the best place to build a new Fire Station based on future developments, environmental changes and areas of greatest need. Not simply choose an area at random and then use the model to calculate from that position. There is no evidence that it is in the best place. Considering the costs of a new Station it would be prudent to ensure that it is correctly sited for now and well into the future. I am also confused with some of your figures, page 33 of the ORH Report states that Thames second pump JX27P2 Mean Turnout Time is 3:00 minutes yet their first pump JX27P1 is closer to 5:00 minutes surely that can’t be correct. Either there has been two coincidental ‘typos’ (very unlikely) or the data has been transposed – worryingly it is this historical data that may have been transferred into all of the modelling done and on which these Proposals (and the removal of Thames 2nd pump) are based. Putting the whole integrity and robustness of the proposal in doubt. The fact it wasn’t even noticed by the ORH or Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service is also a significant cause for concern and needs to be investigated.

2. Good Morning

I am taking the time to email you today to share my personal & in some cases shared opinions of the crew at Chipping Norton fire station regarding the proposed changes. I have submitted my views on the feedback form but feel the direct approach is needed too, so as to really help you understand the detrimental effect this will have on our station. I apologize if this is not appropriate but with my job potentially on the line I feel obliged to do so.

Having been in the service over 8 years now with the first 2 -3 starting at Charlbury then fully transferring over to Chipping Norton I have a good insight of how an on-call fire station can & should be run.

Chipping Norton in the last 3 years has won prestigious awards such as "Fundraiser of the year" & more importantly in my view "Fire station of the year" . These have been very proud moments in mine & the crew's careers as its recognition for what we are doing for the brigade & our local community. Further proof that we are representing the brigade in a good light & showing the core values in all that we do.

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It has been ever present in recent years the importance of Equality & Diversity throughout the brigade & recruitment. We have taken this on board & have been working tirelessly over the last 2 years especially to appeal to more local business's , persons who work independently & young people leaving education to boost our crew levels & I am glad to report that this has been successful.

We have had 3 new recruits in the last 12 months currently on the run with 1 more looking to complete their "fit to ride" next week Another with a proposed start date of February 4th & another booked in on the March 2 week basic, most of which are covering daytime hours , some doing this solely others through shift pattern . Our fire calls attended last year were boosted by 33% on previous years due to more availability during daytime hours. Come springtime our daytime availability will be hugely improved on years gone by due to our efforts on recruitment & unfortunately we have had very little to no help from the brigade in doing this.

Within this new recruitment of personnel, we have a mix of males & females, people being released from local business's & others who are on military shift patterns or work at home , people who are not of English origin. We have accomplished not only recruiting numbers but diverse numbers at that. Yet despite this if the proposed plans go ahead then all of this disappears with the strong possibility of taking your existing fire fighters with them.

There are stations mentioned in your proposals which this could be of benefit but unfortunately Chipping Norton is certainly NOT one of them.

We have worked so hard to keep high standards through all that we do & even in this demoralizing & uncertain time we WILL continue to do so. We want the opportunity to continue to prove these points to you as we are growing from strength to strength , year on year & look to continue in this light.

I spoke at the start of this email by mentioning I was at 2 fire stations , this is important because while I learnt to become a basic fire fighter at Charlbury , I learnt to be part of a Fire Family at Chipping Norton , I have never wanted to become a Whole time firefighter , my ambition is simple & that is to protect & serve my local community , to build a strong bond from young to old where we live & work & with the commitment that we have on station with many talented individuals that's only set to continue.

DONT break up one of the best assets at your disposal .

3. Hello, I am a full time resident in Henley on Thames and I am appalled of the proposal to close the FireStation in Henley on Thames. Henley is a town dating

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back to medieval times. The streets are narrow; some are one way. We have grade one and two listed houses in the centre of the town. Some of these , are next to restaurants, and if a fire were to break out the fire would spread very quickly. Are you aware that Henley has6 residential homes for the elderly ? Also there are at least 8 known retirement communities in the area. These include Laureate Gardens, Victoria Gdns, Bowling Court as well as others in the surrounding areas.There is also a 100 unit project near Henley ,being developed by Elysian Residences. The people occupying these premises, have worked hard all their lives , paid their taxes and deserve to be protected. Also , the residents and businesses pay substantial community charges and business rates and deserve to be protected. Often, there are road works in Henley and it often takes more than 30 minutes to reach the centre of Henley. In my experience it takes less time to exit the town ,than to drive into Henley, in particularly the road between Henley and Wallingford, or Henley and Maidenhead, and of course the Reading Road !
Looking at the map of Oxfordshire,central Oxfordshire and the North(Banbury are well protected. Sadly the south seems somewhat neglected ,particularly if you close the Fire Station here in Henley.
I sincerely hope you read my email, and I ask you to reconsider your recommendations and keep Henley Fire Station open.
Would you be so kind as to reply.

4. I want two fire engines in Thame, because the populous needs it. The firefighters at Thame Fire Station do a marvellous job

5. I am responding rather late in respect of the above consultation, as a resident of Woodstock.

   I have read the consultation proposals and reasoning behind them.

   On checking Woodstock Town Council's response forwarded to you recently, I fully endorse their detailed response and strong opposition to the closure of Woodstock, Eynsham and Kidlington Fire Stations. I completely agree that these proposals, were they to be acted upon, would "undermine public safety and reduce the resilience of the fire and rescue service systems across the area".

6. Thank you for the consultation papers — You assert that if the Henley Station is closed then response times will be the same as now but this cannot surely be the case as Engines will then have to come from Crowmarsh or Reading for Henley residents ? Also, why is it you can't fix the recruitment of on-call firefighters and engine provision for Henley Fire Station.

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Henley residents believe that your assertion that service will not be adversely affected if Henley closes just cannot be factually or actually correct.

7. Hi, i have participated in the online survey and attended when SLT representatives have outlined the proposal. I have asked questions about when changes would start (which is answered in the faq as 2027). I have asked questions about how long to implement the changes which received vague answers because the selection of options would impact it. But never the less it is measured in years and years. (to plan and build new fire stations and get them operational). My question is:
   Knowing that the central government is going to restructure local Government on a timeline of 2028, how can it be sensible to launch a plan that will be invalidated, operated by differently elected officials and likely rug-pulled, before it can even start to return projected benefits? This consultation outcome is likely to attract attention of Section 24 local government and public involvement in health act 2027). Can you break down the proposal into steps that can be achieved in the current governance structure (and cost/success be attributed) and things that can be progressed by future governance structures without invalidating previous spending.
   This is not forward planning at all. It tempts the currently elected to "agree" to spend tax payers money with impunity, believing they can blame the restructure the cause of any disrupted outcome or shortcoming in the realisation projected benefits. EG "not my problem" This has nothing to do with political alignment or the intent of the proposal but the granularity and execution of it.

8. I would like to put forward my view that it would be disastrous if Henley fire station were to close. In 2021, the population of Henley was 12,186. With new builds in the surrounding areas that will have increased. From April to September, with various activities going in Henley, that number rises again. The Reggata, the Festival to name but a few. Traffic is heavy enough in Henley. If the town has to wait for a fire engine to come from outside the town, getting over the bridge or from the Fairmile entrance to the town, that could cost lives! I attended the meeting at Christchurch, which was very interesting and there was an excellent turn out because the people of Henley care about the town and the safety of its residents. We were told at the meeting that the response time for a fire crew to reach Henley from outside, for example Wallingford or Crowmarsh it could take as long as 15-18 minutes. That delay could mean that lives are lost.

9. Surely with all the additional housing appearing we need MORE ENGINES AND FIREMEN NOT less!

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10. Following the well attended public meeting at Christchurch on Thursday 15th January, I am deeply concerned that Henley Ground fire station is at risk of closure and would like to make the following points... 1) From a current 8 minute response, to a possible 16-20 minute response from out-of-area tenders (negotiating narrow lanes and endless roadworks into the mix) does not give Henley residents resilient cover. 2) That the firefighters were not given adequate information as to the proposed closures, resulting in probable redundancies,resignations and redeployment of personnel at other stations, which needs to be addressed.3) P 17 of the consultation states that £600k would be released from the sale of the Henley station but with the inclusion of the forecourt, it would be worth considerably more and this asset needs to be protected.
11. Hello I attended the meeting at Christ Church in Henley on Thursday 15th January. Following that, I have tried to register https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ , but I am still waiting for a 4-digit Verification Code to be sent to my email address....hours after I started that process. Please can you check that that system is working, because it is not working for me and I am very literate with such online systems. I suspect that it's not working properly and is not allowing people to have their say, ahead of the deadline tomorrow (20th Jan) So instead I am sending my thoughts to you via this email address of fire.consultation@oxfordshire.gov.uk Please can you acknowledge that you have received this email. Looking at the various proposals, it seems totally obvious to me that Proposal C (Closure of three on-call fire stations in Henley, Eynsham & Woodstock) is completely unacceptable. The data presented only mentions averages across the county, when it is clear that the response times for Henley residents (and those living in the surrounding villages) would be much, much worse, leaving us all at greater danger of death, injury and damage, if a fire were to occur. We would be dependent on an appliance coming from Caversham Rd, in Reading, across the border in Berkshire, or from other further station in Oxfordshire. Have you had any support from any Henley area residents for this proposal? I would be surprised if you had, considering the volume and veracity of sentiment that you must have heard at Christ Church, last week.

    We heard how Henley Fire Station was previously reduced from 2 appliances to 1....with the promise that that remaining appliance (plus the station) were secure for the long-term future. It now seems as if we were misled.

    What about the people who live in Remenham and other villages, across the bridge, and into Berkshire, who are also reliant on Henley Fore Station? Have you properly accounted for their needs?
12. Dear Sir/Madam,

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Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Fire and Rescue Cover Model consultation. I want to be clear at the outset that I recognise and accept that change is needed. Oxfordshire is growing, risks are evolving, and the current system is under strain. Doing nothing is not an option.

However, I fundamentally disagree with the majority of the proposals set out in this consultation, because they focus on removing or downgrading parts of the system before the Service has properly attempted to fix what is clearly a failing model – particularly the on-call system – or meaningfully involved the workforce in defining better solutions.

The central issue is system failure, not workforce failure National inspection bodies and professional organisations have been clear for several years that declining on-call availability is a national, structural issue driven by modern working patterns, housing costs, cost-of-living pressures and post-COVID impacts. It is not a lack of commitment from on-call firefighters.

Despite this, the consultation proposals largely treat availability decline as justification for station removal, mergers, or replacement with more expensive models, rather than as evidence that the on-call system itself urgently needs reform, investment and modernisation.

In my view, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has not moved quickly enough to refresh its CRMP strategy in light of this reality, nor to trial meaningful reforms that could stabilise and improve availability before proposing irreversible structural change.

Reform before removal

I strongly believe that before any station is closed, downgraded or merged, the Service must be able to demonstrate that all reasonable steps have been taken to reform and support the on-call model. That includes:

- Modernising duty systems to reflect modern employment and family life
- Flexible and pooled on call / part time availability models
- Faster recruitment, training and officership pathways
- Better management of sickness and mental health support
- Better management of facilities and support functions
- Full review of all non-ops functions to prioritise operational workforce
- Targeted central support for stations during periods of low availability
- Better use of live data to proactively close availability gaps
- A transparent cost comparison between reforming on-call and expanding wholetime provision

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These options have been raised repeatedly by the workforce and align with national recommendations, yet they are not meaningfully explored or costed in the consultation. Removing stations before exhausting these options risks permanently losing experienced staff, local resilience and public trust.

Workforce involvement is essential

The workforce is not resisting change – it is asking to be involved in shaping it. The absence of a co-produced option, developed with frontline and on-call expertise, is one of the most concerning aspects of this consultation.

Proposals such as day-crewed stations and extended 12-hour shifts risk damaging morale, wellbeing, recruitment and retention. Micromanaging productivity through rigid structural change, rather than addressing root causes across the organisation, is unlikely to deliver sustainable improvement.

What is needed is not piecemeal adjustment, but a whole-organisation overhaul: culture, support functions, recruitment pipelines, training capacity, leadership development and operational flexibility. Only then can the Service become the elite, agile, high-performing organisation it should aspire to be.

Value for money and future financial risk

With Oxfordshire County Council facing significant financial pressures in the coming years, it is critical that decisions represent best long-term value for public money. On-call stations, when properly supported, provide local response, community engagement and resilience at a fraction of the cost of fully wholetime alternatives.

Closing stations and expanding wholetime provision may offer short-term certainty on paper, but risks higher long-term costs, reduced flexibility, and greater dependency on fewer assets. Reforming what we already have is not only operationally sensible, it is financially responsible.

My position

- I support change, but not change that removes capability before fixing the system
- I support more wholetime cover where risk genuinely demands it, but do not think day crewing is a viable solution.
- I do not support unnecessary station closures, day-crewed models, or 12-hour shifts that undermine the workforce
- I believe the on-call model should be radically reformed, invested in and valued – not allowed to fail by design
- I believe the workforce must be actively involved in defining the future model

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If we are going to make changes that will shape fire cover for decades, then let us make changes that respect the people who deliver the service, protect communities properly, and make the very best use of public money.

I urge the Service to pause irreversible decisions, fully explore reform-led options alongside the workforce, and ensure that no part of Oxfordshire loses fire cover simply because a national system has not yet been fixed locally.

And finally, I would argue that this consultation has brought the brigade into disrepute and there should be an investigation to ensure that due diligence and duty of care has been taken before taking this to the public.

13. I have read the consultation document. Unfortunately, I do not have time to complete the survey. However, I do wish to comment. I object to the closure of Rewley Road fire station. As a long term resident of Osney Island, I feel the need for a city centre station is essential. We have seen recently that there was a fire in the city centre at Mansfield College. There are old buildings in Oxford, which have a greater fire risk. I also object to making professional fire fighters redundant. These people do an amazing job, often putting their own lives at risk. And, sadly, losing them, as we saw at Bicester.

14. Dear Sir / Madam, I have read your report documenting that fire stations could be closed and operating costs might be reduced. I understand that there is a dis-connect with the use of fire fighting labour resources. This seems to be result of historic working patterns and changes in working practices which challenge the availability of fire fighters during daytime hours. But I fail to see that reducing the number of fire stations will the aims you describe. This is clearly a labour management issue, NOT a fire station location issue! Yes, it appears reasonable to reduce availability during night time hours given demand appears to be less. It is obvious that pay and attractive work conditions should apply for daytime fire fighters. Clearly this is not happening to make it sufficiently attractive to recruit the manning levels needed to respond to demand needs?
Once you cut facilities this cannot be put back. Your highly paid consultants making these “one size fits all, economies of scale” proposals clearly don’t live this area to understand to complexity of the congested road systems by proposing a single site which will log jammed by nearby roads. A fire happening? No forget the fire engines won’t get there!
Having more options from different locations creating access benefits which you ignore to the your peril and to those lives at risk of fire. Sorry cutting cuts does not save lives. My parents served with the Oxford fire service during World War. God forbid we have another war, but one bomb on a new fire station would mean curtains for us all. Change your thoughts! Change these proposals for the sake of us all!

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15. This ancient medieval town - with twisting streets and confined access - would burn rapidly like a tinder box just as it did in the Great Fire of London were the town not to have the protection of a rapid response to an emergency from a skilled fire fighting team based in the town. A recent hotel fire showed just how quickly they were on the scene measured against the arrival of outside back up fire engines from neighbouring towns. Henley is also close to important to the UKs defence military airfields. In these uncertain times who could rule out a misdirected drone attack, or sadly an aircraft crash on a densely built town centre which cannot be accessed quickly in an emergency. This is unlike neighbouring Marlow for example with its 'outer M25 bypass' access in the event of an emergency. Please view Henley using appropriate criteria and keep and improve our fire station.

16. Hello I am a Henley resident. I have read the Consultation document, attended the online consultation meeting on 3/12/25, completed the online survey and attended the long-awaited public meeting on 15 January 2026 (5 days before the consultation period is planned to close!). I have to say that the more I learn about the proposals to improve the Service, the less I can understand how they will improve it for Henley. The map showing the Response Times (Summary Cumulative) shows little or no improvement. And why was this sheet not included in the copies of the document given to attendees at the meeting yesterday evening? The data presented yesterday evening, and elsewhere, shows that response times will be degraded. The Henley fire station is in a key geographical location to serve a growing urban population and the surrounding very rural area of South Oxfordshire and beyond. It seems that there has been no attempt to look at ways to improve the service from the Henley fire station - in terms of recruitment and reconfiguring the staffing. It is time for a rethink on any changes.

17. Good morning.I attended the meeting in Henley last night on the above and from my point of view, how to save Henley fire station. The evidence provided by some of the audience was compelling to keep the station open. The fire service data information /evidence was proven it appeared , to be very flawed. And using projected data from a data scheme, that has already proven to be flawed (such as one apparently used by the ambulance service).In essence it would be safer , probably cheaper and definitely more efficient to keep Henley fire station going , and use that as the hub to provide fire service to the surrounding areas. I very much hope my views (and those of the supporters at the meeting last night), are taken into consideration to keep Henley fire station open.

18. I attended the public meeting on the 12th January in Eynsham as a local resident and parish councillor. I was surprised that comments made at the meeting were not captured by OCC staff and used as part of the consultation response. This does not seem to follow best practice. Further I am concerned that the supporting financial analysis of the proposals is absent. The implication is that this is a break even set of proposals but this is not clearly modelled unless I have

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missed this. If the service were allocated new additional funds to move to the five full day shifts would the other changes and closures be required? I suspect not - so rather than press for additional funds to reduce risk we are faced with flat funding and an increased risk. I also do not see how redundancies will be funded - and do not support them in any case. Such a waste of skilled resource which it sounded like can not be redeployed. I also have concerns about the selection of Eynsham for closure. It is not in the bottom 3 for performance (available shifts) - faces an increasing challenge with significant new housing doubling the size of the community - and seems to yield very little in the way of a capital receipt if sold. The consultation is opaque about the selection / scoring process for choosing stations for closure and there is no option analysis which I would expect in a consultation document. The public is being given no choice and no clear rationale. No attention is paid to the intangible benefits of a local service being maintained - increasing awareness at village events etc. I think the consultation is inadequate and therefore do not support the proposals countywide and specifically for Eynsham.
Any answers to my points raised would be good so that I can share them with Parish Council colleagues.

19. Impact of Fire Cover Model Proposal on Chipping Norton Crew and Town

- DAY COVER

Chipping Norton have worked exceptionally hard to recruit daytime on call crew. We have developed strong relationships with local businesses to release staff and have successfully targeted home workers. As a result we have 6 crew who release from work to respond, and an additional 2 new recruits on the March basic for daytime cover too.
Our daytime cover is an anomaly to many stations – Chipping Norton's oncall daytime crewing is really strong and still growing.

- SKILLS

We have a good spread of skills and experience at Chippy. We also have a WT level 1 joining us in February, and one of our experienced firefighters who gives cover every single day is also on his Level 1 ICD in March - both strengthening our daytime incident commander options to 4. In addition to this, we have plenty of drivers and BA wearers in our oncall day crew, so are competent as well as available.

- JOB LOSSES (if the proposals go ahead)

Immediate job losses for 50% of our crew who only give day cover in their contract

- LOSS OF NIGHT COVER

We have fewer crew contracted solely for nights (3). But we manage to keep the pump on using ad-hoc extra cover given by those with daytime contracts. If they lose their jobs they won't be able to give extra cover - without them there will be NO GUARANTEED FIRE COVER IN CHIPPING NORTON BETWEEN 6PM AND 6AM. The closest guaranteed appliance would come from Banbury. This longer response time gives a greater threat to life and property.

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COMMUNITY Chipping Norton Crew are a community crew. The proposals state that Whole Time Day Cover would allow for "more community activities to take place" – This is untrue for Chipping Norton:

- We visit every school in the town every year, and also have them to station.
- We work with the local Scouts and Brownie groups for safety talks
- We undertake Safe and Well visits in the area to support vulnerable members of our community.
- We attend all local community events that we are invited to, such as fetes, festivals, Remembrance Day and Pride.

IN SUMMARY
At Chipping Norton we are almost at the point where we are fully self-sufficient. With the new level 1 incident commander coming through in March, and a WT level 1 incident commander joining us we will be stronger than ever after March 2026.
Day crewing Chipping Norton with whole-time would mean ***the loss of a dedicated local crew that are currently already available for daytime incidents***, and as a knock on, a loss of our fire engine at night. ***Please reconsider the WT Day Crew of Chipping Norton and use the resources elsewhere.***

OFRS consultation responses (emails and other correspondence) from individuals (redacted)

20. I have read the consultation document. Unfortunately, I do not have time to complete the survey. However, I do wish to comment.

I object to the closure of Rewley Road fire station. As a long term resident of Osney Island, I feel the need for a city centre station is essential. We have seen recently that there was a fire in the city centre at Mansfield College. There are old buildings in Oxford, which have a greater fire risk. I also object to making professional fire fighters redundant. These people do an amazing job, often putting their own lives at risk. And, sadly, losing them, as we saw at Bicester.

21. I think this proposal is not valid at all.As the whereabouts of the new venue for the new fire station in north Oxford has not yet been decided, how can you possible give accurate predictions on travel and say it will save time. It is well known it is a nightmare getting out of Oxford to travel north at the best of times, let alone in rush hour. This will add bad delays to any fire engine north to attend an event. Whereas having one in kidlington is more sensible. I think the new proposal is a bad move and the consultation has been cleverly structured to look good but in practice it will be a bad move. In addition the disruption to fire fighters , their lives, their work and extra load and their morale will be very bad. I do not support this consultation and I support keeping kidlington going.

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22. I believe the main proposal is the best one. Reducing Rewley Road by one engine and using full time firefighters at that station.
If you combine Kidlington in the additional proposal, it is carefully worded but I am assuming the firefighters would lose their free housing and have to purchase or rent nearer the proposed joint station in North Oxford? The additional time suggested for appliances to reach fires if the stations were combined seems farcical.

23. I am writing this as an ex-Fire Officer who had organisational responsibility for Incident Command training and assessment, Organisational Health and Safety management and technical rescue provision and delivery.

Having read the proposals, they are written in such a way as to focus on the minutia - written in to prevent any real engagement by the public, who understandably do not have detailed knowledge and understanding of the Fire Service.

The Fire service is there to meet the provisions of the 2004 Fire and Rescue Services Act (service to the community); also to meet the requirement of the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act in conjunction with the 1999 management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (responsibility for the care of employees and the public through the way they work). These proposals significantly compromise both legal duties.

In reality, the proposals concern the completion of prevention duties and amount to a land grab within Oxford and Kidlington. Thankfully, prevention duties over the last 20 years have been effective in driving down emergency calls. This, along with increased standards of living and improvement in social behaviours (such as a reduction in smoking), have reduced operational calls. These advancements, however, will never remove the need for skilled operational response. I firmly believe that operational response has been neglected for many years and there has in my observation, been a significant decline in operational competence and effectiveness of crews in the emergency environment. Some of the personal qualities and attributes (PQAs) have been actively discouraged in the selection process. For example: a healthy risk appetite, adaptability, problem-solving and mental resilience. Additionally, neglect in the provision of training venues to ensure crews can maintain competence in their role and removal of the provision of a hot fire breathing apparatus venue are most concerning.

Most residents of Oxfordshire understand operational response as the key role of the fire service. In plain language - they are having a difficult day when they phone 999, and they need a response that will return the situation to the best version of normal possible.

One of the most significant and unrecognised cuts in this consultation is the disbandment of the specialist Rescue Tender. Its creation was designed to develop

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enhanced specialist skills and to support Firefighter safety. This single point of failure has been in place for 40 years and never once failed. Since 1985 it has driven significant improvement across the organisation in Road Traffic Collision procedures leading to significantly improved outcomes for those affected. This also with improvements in animal rescue, water and flood response (2007), rope rescue and working a height. There are many people alive today due to the intervention of this team. I conducted approximately 1500 extrications of individuals from the most serious road accidents in a 13-year period. These were where the initial crews either had limited competence or equipment to resolve the incident.

One key element for the Rescue Tender is the selection process for already competent firefighter to do this role. They need to be fully competent and have a slow degradation of their base line skills to be able to take on the additional skills requires. They also need an aptitude for working in fast flowing flood water and at extreme height. Their personal resilience also needs to be at a heightened level as they are often the backstop, last line of defence at the most serious and complex incidents. This crew saved the two firefighters trapped under the door at Bicester Motion due to their willingness to step forward when others could not cope.

Clearly, the specialist equipment on this vehicle is not the fundamental component - it is the people and their willingness to respond. It takes a considerable time for individuals (years), combined with lots of practice to become competent in these skills. Oxfordshire rescue crews are (were) held up as an example of excellence by national training providers (Outreach, water rescue, and boat) to other Fire and Rescue services.

I will admit that I was part of this team for 15 years and I was instrumental in many of the changes and improvements that occurred. These changes were required to meet national guidance and legislation which were not being met at the time. Within this time, we did have some organisational support however there was an underlying dynamic and stated intentions for the vehicle to be split up, and families turned out of their homes (1995 to 2010). The proposals in the consultation will disband this close knit and effective team.

Additionally, there are no costings for additional vehicles to carry the equipment, or costings for the required mobilisation changes by fire control. There is no indication where they would be positioned. They could only go on the 24-hour crewed station if they are to be continually available. Some of these stations are positioned at the extremities of the County and would lead to extended attendance times. Mobilisation of these assets would then remove the fire cover from these areas. Specialist rescue incidents would need multiple responses from multiple teams to meet a single incidents needs due to crossover of skills.

A solution to this would be to move the vehicle on mass to the new Northern Gateway site along with the provision of quality housing for the 14 crew and their families who give 50% of their hours a year to supporting and protecting their community. Not ideal due to the impact on children and families, but a pragmatic solution. The council and organisation could then show a real example of them meeting the values they so

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grandly promote but the cultural reviews of 2023-2024 so clearly showed was lacking. Build costs would be more than covered by the sale of the current housing stock.

The final driver for these changes is the strategic aim for alignment with the Thames Valley partners, Bucks and Royal Berks FRS. This is a fundamentally flawed concept and was an outcome of the failed regional fire control project. The creation of the Thames Valley Fire Control was a political need for some visible success after this catastrophic failure. From its inception, Thames Valley Fire Control has in no way provided the same level of diligent mobilisation and incident support provided by our own inhouse control. At its inception I was Health and Safety Manager for Oxfordshire Fire Service and was aware of significant failings in the mobilisation of the correct assets to the correct location. I raised this as a legislative issue under section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act (section 3 - changes in the way an organisation works) and requested visible records of this were kept within the health and safety management system (all mis-mobilisation should be recorded as a near miss). This did not occur and ironically, I was shortly after reassigned to my previous post as Command Training Manager.

I am aware that the situation has not significantly improved, especially around the mobilisation of specialist assets and alternative shift patterns. The underlying mobilisation software is agricultural, will not support any differences between the 3 organisations and has significant financial implications when making any changes.

All the proposed changes will require alterations within this mobilisation system for which there is no evidence of effective management.

I agree, that change is required; the retained/on-call model has been struggling for decades since the introduction of the part time workers regs. At this point many of our on-call stations were available 24/7. Over the last 20 years or so the organisation introduced a much more onerous administrative load on individuals trying to complete a full-time level of training and competence on two hours a week. In short, a group of individuals used to provide emergency cover to their local towns and village as part of the social responsibility and cohesion, and they had their own identity. It was enjoyable and achievable. Through poor management culture (namely bad leadership, lack of trust, favouritism leading to lowering of standards, disillusionment, and low morale) and imposed loads it has become onerous, and the joy has been lost.

I can evidence this through many personal connections around the County and the direct experience of my stepson. My professional roles on the Rescue Tender and in assessing command competence of the crew and watch managers from all these stations gave me 1:1 time with them. These decay is a direct result of a number of strategic decisions around recruitment competencies and organisational values. The additional scrutiny and load from management also created the 14 station support roles, which are all expensive management positions required to solve a problem introduced by this cultural change. A decision to allow direct entry to the wholetime role from the retained/on call has encouraged the perception that being on call is a stepping stone to a full-time job - and not a community commitment. Although people have always earned additional income from the retained role, this was never the driver for

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carrying it out. Organisational culture is an underlying issue as identified in the recent report.

A definitive example is the recording of competence. This electronic system requires staff to maintain green traffic lights on their profile. Many hours are spent doing electronic multi choice quizzes to turn a competence green. All the quizzes can be passed by – shall we politely say -cheating. The records are therefore not a robust record of competence. It is a national issue. Operational response is a practical skill, not one gained through e-learning alone. This tedious task of administration prevents practical training in both the on-call and wholetime arena. As previously identified, resources are limited to achieve this.

Alternative ways to support additional cover would be to expand the recruitment pool. There are many individuals who would make good on-call firefighters within their local community who would not be able to meet the arbitrary answers of a PQA based interview. I know this from direct observation and inclusion within the interview process. Addressing the above described work load, management culture, and base line values for becoming an on-call firefighter would equally help. There are young men, many I would suggest with neurodiversity traits such as ADHD, or dyslexia, which would relish the pressure of the operational response role and physicality required, that do not see a space for them or their specific PQA's. 4% of Oxfordshire's population are ex-military, that is 23,000 people who are used to working in high-risk structured organisations who are not actively targeted or encouraged for the on-call role.

In summary, these changes proposed in the consultation will significantly increase risk to both people and property due to increased response times and a significant decrease in weight of response. This risk would affect the complex heritage property in central Oxford and to the population most significantly to the north and west of the city.

I maintain that the organisation will not be meeting its legislative requirement in the provision of a Fire and Rescue Service and the Health Safety at Work Act.

24. I think your planing to close fire stations is very shortsighted and will end up with loss of live and then an enormous amount of money to rectify.

More and more houses are being built everywhere with more and more traffic on the roads and you believe its a good idea to close fire stations that will increase response times and with fewer engines available.

Also how disrespectful to the memory of Jenny Logan and Martyn Sadler.

Please tell me how our council tax increases year on year but services decrease.

May some councillors on extortionate wages should lose their jobs instead of firefighter who save lives!

25. Only one question really we have had fire engines here in Kidlington for as long as I have lived here that's 67 years . But did here that our station was closing and being

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moved to north Oxford I'm assuming summertown area? It that true. The problem arises when they are called out for north Kidlington that's about 2 minutes to here but for Kidlington as a whole from summertown that would be about 10 minutes. But when the stadium is built the A4160 the most direct route will be closed on match days then your appliances will have to go via the A44 route or islip if the Cherwell isn't in flood that would be 20-25 routes for both . You see our predicament. Besides your crews here are very good we don't want to lose them. TVP and south central ambulance have also raised this concern for there response times also. In addition planning permission for a further 4000 houses is going through now with CDC and if Kidlington becomes a town which is currently under discussion we would warrant retaining our fire, ambulance stations here and the police would also have a permanent station here for the public. Sorry to burden you but we're are very concerned about this

26. Unfortunately, I feel that there is little to no point with completing a survey since, from experience, a "consultation" is merely paying lip service to democracy, and their preferred decision will be made irrespectively.

Planning should not have been considered, let alone approved without the required infrastructure in place. However, we continuously observe that no lessons are learnt and existing services struggle to d

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Oxfordshire County Council

Equalities Impact Assessment

Fire and Rescue Cover Model

13/08/2025

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	Community Safety Services
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Proposals for changes to the Fire and Rescue Service's emergency response model.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	Existing function
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	Proposed changes to the Fire and Rescue emergency response model, that would be subject to public consultation, involving the introduction of day shift wholetime systems at five existing on-call stations, a potential new fire station towards the north of Oxford to combine Rewley Road and Kidlington fire stations. Additional options include investment proposals, closure of up to three on-call fire stations and the removal of the second fire engine at Thame. The recommendations and considerations for change would create greater parity in emergency response performance across the county with performance improving in general in rural and lower density urban areas. It is anticipated that this greater parity in response performance, although worsening the service slightly for Oxford's more relatively deprived communities, would offset an existing inequality in emergency response performance and positively support Oxfordshire's rural communities.
Completed By	Jason Crapper
Authorised By	Rob MacDougall
Date of Assessment	13 Aug 2025

Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	Community Safety Services commissioned a review of the Fire and Rescue cover model because of a long-term decline in On-Call availability, particularly during daytime hours. Reducing On-Call availability results in a reduction in day-to-day fire engine availability, increasing service overtime costs, increased emergency response times and reduced service productivity. The review also offers the opportunity to ensure that the service's operating model aligns resources appropriately with community risk.
Proposals Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	It is proposed that the Fire and Rescue Service proceed to public consultation concerning recommended changes, and further considerations for changes, to the Fire and Rescue cover model used within the service. The recommendations comprise core changes to the way in which some fire engines are crewed using a set of key principles which are as follows: • Reducing the use of full-time (wholetime) firefighters at nighttime and instead increasing the use of these staff during the daytime at various stations to provide more resilient daytime appliance availability and to improve firefighter productivity during the day in activities such as our prevention work. • Relying on part-time (on-call) firefighters more at night when their availability is very good. • Increasing the parity in emergency response performance between more densely populated urban areas and less densely populated urban and rural areas to enable a redistribution of resources to provide more resilient daytime appliance availability. The resulting response model could result in the following changes: 1. The introduction of a day shift wholetime system at Chipping Norton, Faringdon, and Wallingford (or Crowmarsh site relocated from Wallingford) to crew the fire engine during the day with the current on-

call crews crewing the fire engine at night. This will also allow local on-call crews to focus recruitment energies on nighttime hours.

2. The introduction of a day shift wholetime system at Bicester and Witney to crew the first fire engine in the day with the current on-call crews crewing the second fire engine during the day and both fire engines at night.
3. The removal of the on-call fire engine from Rewley Road.
4. The building of a new fire station towards the north of Oxford to replace both Rewley Road and Kidlington fire stations. This new station would house two fire engines and a high reach appliance (hydraulic platform) with one of the fire engines crewed on a 24/7 basis by wholetime staff. The second fire engine would be crewed by day shift wholetime staff in the day and on-call crews at night with on-call staff being transferred and permanently rehomed from Kidlington Fire Station.
5. Investment options that would entail additional investment in the number of firefighters to maintain an additional fire engine 24/7 for Oxford, to maintain station crewing levels at current levels or to enable the service to retain Station Support Officers.
6. The closure of one, two or three fire stations at Woodstock, Eynsham and/or Henley due to perennially poor on-call availability.
7. The removal of the second fire engine from Thame Fire Station due to perennially poor availability.

These options have been developed over several months and following extensive independent modelling with a third-party consultant with the aim of trying to improve both the availability and response performance of fire engines in Oxfordshire. The proposals being offered are forecasted to improve overall fire engine response performance across Oxfordshire as a whole. However, there are unavoidable conflicts to make such improvements within the existing cost envelope which means that there are forecasted to be corresponding reductions in response performance at other times and/or in certain parts of the county to deliver these overall benefits. These can be summarised as follows:

- Whilst there are significant first fire engine response improvements forecasted during the day in four out of the five local council areas, the performance in Oxford City is forecasted to be slightly worse under the options being put forward. This is a result of the conscious move to transfer resources to less densely populated rural areas that suffer from poor on-call firefighter availability and thus ensuring greater parity in response performance across the county. However, the level of emergency response

resources is proposed to be kept higher for Oxford compared to other parts of the county due to its risk profile. This means that despite the reduction, response performance is still forecasted to be between 1% and 12% better in Oxford City than other parts of the county overall.

- First fire engine response performance is forecasted to be marginally worse at night across the county overall but with some improvements in three of the five local council areas. For Oxford City, the response performance at night is forecasted to be worse than it is now but with broadly the same performance across the day and night.
- Second fire engine response performance is forecasted to improve overall with bigger improvements during the day. Response performance for the second fire engine to incidents reduces at night in four out of the five local council areas.

Evidence / Intelligence

List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.

- Mid-Year Population Estimates, England and Wales, June 2023 – Used to assess any dipropionate impacts on persons of different ages.
- Ethnic Group Census 2021 data – Used to assess any dipropionate impacts on persons belonging to different ethnic groups.
- Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019, The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 Oxford City Results – Used to assess any dipropionate impacts on areas of deprivation.
- Census 2021 religious data – Used to provide data regarding the distribution of people identifying as having a religion.
- Disability census 2021 data – Used to provide data regarding the Distribution of people identifying as having a disability.

Additionally, various sources were used to identify registered places of worship as follows:

District Name	Buddhist	Chapel	Christian	Islam	Jehova's Witness	Judaism	Nirankari	Temple	Grand Total
Cherwell		3	132	1	1			1	138
Oxford City	1	5	89	3		1	1		100
South Oxfordshire		3	125		1				129
Vale of White Horse		7	114						121
West Oxfordshire		1	121		1				123
Grand Total	**1**	**19**	**581**	**4**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**611**

To assist the analysis further, information in relation to risk factors for dwelling fires have been used to assist in understanding the equality impacts of the proposed changes.

The NFCC have commissioned risk stratification research to understand the risk factors for dwelling fires. These can be separated into factors affecting the risk of a person being killed in an accidental dwelling fire and those that affect the risk of a person having an accidental dwelling fire or being injured by one. According to the research, the risk of a person being killed in an accidental dwelling fire are driven by the following factors:

- Over 70 years old, particularly in combination with any pre-existing mental or physical impairment including frailty.
- Children under 11 years old, but especially under 5 years who are less likely to be able to self-rescue.
- Being male (particularly when combined with other risk factors)
- Smokers – especially if combined with poor mobility or other health condition.
- Low Socioeconomic Status (SES) i.e. deprivation.
- Disability or long-term health condition (including dementia).
- Mental and/or physical impairment caused by alcohol and/or drugs.
- Non-owned property or mobile home – this may be a proxy indicator for low SES.
- Single-parent families, and households with more children.

The risk of a person being injured by an accidental dwelling fire are instead driven by the following factors:

- Living alone.
- Having had a fire before, and lack of basic fire safety knowledge.
- More prevalent among people in the 40-49 age group.

With respect to Road Traffic Collision risk, research by the NFCC indicated that statistical modelling for likelihood did not produce any pertinent demographic findings, although some factors were tentatively linked to higher rates of RTCs. However, such risk factors do not define where an RTC might occur, and the likelihood and consequences of RTCs are instead driven by risk factors pertaining to the road itself. As such, for the purposes of this EIA, there are no adverse equality impacts pertaining to RTCs as a result of the proposed emergency response model.

Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	Extensive modelling has taken place in arriving at the recommendations for change summarised above. However, no alternative stand-alone models have been fully developed and therefore the recommendations should currently be viewed alongside a 'do nothing' option which is forecast to result in continued long term decline in on-call availability and reduced overall appliance availability.

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	☒	☐	☐	The proportional age of residents across the five local council areas are broadly similar except for a spike in the population of Oxford between the ages of 20 and 24 that is commensurate the city's student population. The 20-24 age group is not			

				considered to be a group that is disproportionately vulnerable to domestic fires. On that basis, any proposed changes that results in a more equal emergency response performance across the five district council areas would have a positive impact on age equality.			
Disability	☒	☐	☐	People that have a disability or long-term health condition (including dementia) are at higher risk of being killed in an accidental dwelling fire. Based on age-standardised proportions, people identifying as being disabled with day-to-day activities limited a lot vary marginally across Oxfordshire with the highest being 6.2% in Oxford and the lowest being 4.7% in South Oxfordshire. Given that these differences are only slight, it is taken that the proposed model of response does not have an overall impact on persons identifying as being disabled.			

Gender Reassignment	☒	☐	☐				
Marriage & Civil Partnership	☒	☐	☐				
Pregnancy & Maternity	☒	☐	☐				
Race	☒	☐	☐	Ethnic groups which are not "White British" by local council in Oxfordshire are greatest in Oxford with 46.5% and lowest in West Oxfordshire with 11%. Whilst the proposed changes would have a disproportional impact on non-White British communities in Oxford, ethnicity is not considered to be a risk factor with respect to accidental dwelling fires. On this basis, it is considered that the proposed changes would result in a more equal emergency response performance across the five district council areas with no specific adverse impact on people from certain ethnic groups.			

Sex	☒	☐	☐	Whilst being male is a recognised risk factor with respect to accidental dwelling fires, the proportion of male to female is broadly the same across Oxfordshire and therefore the proposed emergency response model would not have an adverse impact on males.			
Sexual Orientation	☒	☐	☐				

Religion or Belief	☒	☐	☐	The proportion of people identifying that they have a religion is broadly similar across the five district council areas: Cherwell = 59.48% Oxford = 56.69% South Oxfordshire = 56.21% Vale of the White Horse = 55.63% West Oxfordshire = 56.85% With respect to the numbers of registered places of worship, these are also very similar across the the five local council areas with 14% difference between the four council areas with the most registered buildings. Oxford City stands out as having the fewest number of registered places of worship, albeit serving a more densely populated area. The number of registered non-Christian places of worship across Oxfordshire are overall much smaller but greatest in Oxford with six, perhaps reflecting the greater diversity within Oxford City's population. Taken altogether, it is suggested that the proposed risk model will not have an adverse impact on			

				people who identify as having a religion.			

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	☐	☒	☐	The proposed changes are resulting in greater parity in response performance between Oxford City and the other parts of the county, creating improvements in the response performance and prevention work productivity in the county's more rural areas.			
Armed Forces	☒	☐	☐				
Carers	☒	☐	☐				
Areas of deprivation	☐	☐	☒	As of 2019, Oxford remains the most deprived of the five Oxfordshire districts. On that basis, any change that results in a poorer emergency response to Oxford City	The proposed changes would indirectly address existing inequalities in emergency response performance in Oxfordshire. As such, whilst the response		

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				arguably has an overall detrimental impact on those areas of deprivation in Oxford. However, there are also relatively deprived areas in other parts of the county and therefore this would partially be offset by improved responses in the rest of the county.	performance is forecast to worsen in Oxford, the overall response performance and service resilience is still set to be higher in Oxford and this has included the proposed commitment to maintaining the fire station at Slade Park in Oxford which is well located to respond to some of Oxford's more deprived areas.		

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Wider Impacts

Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Staff	☐	☒	☐	The creation of new day shift opportunities across the service is anticipated to offer welcomed opportunities for some staff to continue to operate on fire engine crews without the nighttime			

Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				commitments that extend to our current duty systems. Additionally, the widening of daytime wholetime appliance availability will reduce the pressure on some on-call crews to provide daytime fire engine availability which can have a corresponding negative impact on family life.			
Other Council Services	☒	☐	☐				
Providers	☒	☐	☐				
Social Value [1]	☒	☐	☐				

[1] If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	
Person Responsible for Review	
Authorised By	

Climate Impact Assessment tool

Oxfordshire County Council has made a commitment to ensure that both the climate and the natural environment are at the heart of all our decision making. This means that if you're putting together a proposal for new a policy, strategy, project, programme or budget, you need to identify its impact.

Our preferred method for doing this is by conducting a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA). CIA is a structured process for considering the implications for people and their environment of proposed actions while there is still an opportunity to improve the proposals.

When to complete a Climate Impact Assessment

Cabinet reports - a Climate Impact Assessment must be completed for reports requesting Cabinet approval of policy, capital projects, budget, commercial investment and any other key decisions that may have a material impact on our ability to address the climate and ecological emergency.

Project initiation (including capital projects) - a Climate Impact Assessment must be completed during the early stages of a project, when developing the Project Mandate and the Project Initiation Document (PID) or, in the case of a capital project, when completing the initial Business Case. This is to ensure that any impacts are identified at an early stage, allowing the team the opportunity to address any areas of concern and maximise positive

How to use the Climate Impact Assessment tool

1.Download the latest version of the excel tool and the guidance from the intranet
2.Fill in the proposal details in the tab 'Input proposal details'
Fill in the areas shaded in blue.
The 'Summary of assessment' section can only be written after completing the impact assessment in the next step.
3.Fill in the impact assessment in the tab 'Input assessment'
For the tool to work, excel macros must be enabled. If the macros are not enabled, you'll see a message at the top of the sheet with the option to 'Enable Content'.
Fill in the areas shaded in blue.
Write the report name in cell C5. This will used to name the pdf report file.
For each category, assess the impacts of your proposal. Use the provided Guidance for a general scoring guide, descriptions of each criteria and examples with different scores. Describe the impact for each sub-category. If a negative impact is identified, describe how it will be mitigated, who will be responsible and the timeline and monitoring arrangements. The score for each category is a weighted average of the scores of its sub-categories; it is not a simple sum.
As you input your scores, the wheel will be updated to show the ratings and colour code for each category.
Please note the Climate Action team (Climate.Action@Oxfordshire.gov.uk) are on hand to offer guidance on completing the assessment and to work with your team to identify mitigation measures to reduce negative impacts and to maximise potential benefits.
Don't write anything in the 'Report output' tab. The cells in this tab will be automatically populated with the content you inputted in the 'Input proposal details' and 'Input assessment' tabs and will be used to produce your PDF report.

4.If your CIA will be included in a Business Case or Cabinet report, please send the excel file to the Climate Action team for review, using the email Climate.action@oxfordshire.gov.uk
5.The Climate Action team will aim to review and approve the report within 2-3 working days. When necessary, the Climate Action team will work with the report author to ensure that the assessment is accurate and any opportunities to further align the proposed initiative with the council's climate commitments are explored.
6.Once approved by the Climate Action Team, the assessment is signed off by the relevant senior manager.
7.Prepare a Climate Impact Assessment report by pressing 'Create a pdf report' in the tab 'Input assessment'; a report is automatically generated and saved on your desktop; the file name will be the project name (cell C5 on tab 'Input assessment') plus a timestamp which can be used to track file versions.
8.You can also copy the wheel to paste into documents using the buttons 'Copy wheel to clipboard' and 'Save wheel to desktop' in the tab 'Input assessment'; make sure to paste the wheel as a picture and include alt-text for accessibility, which can be obtained by pressing 'Copy wheel's alt-text' in the tab 'Input assessment'.
9.The CIA should be revisited as the work evolves to ensure the best climate and ecological outcomes are achieved.

For further information on how to use this tool, see the guidance notes and video tutorials.

Climate Impact Assessment

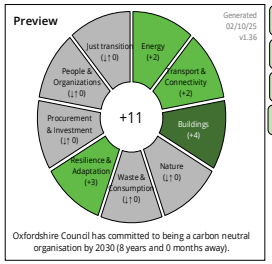
Details of proposal - *fill in all the areas shaded in blue*

Directorate and Service Area	Community Safety Services, Fire and rescue Service
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Proposed Fire and Rescue Cover Model
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	This is a new proposed emergency response model for the Fire and Rescue Service
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. **(following completion of the assessment).**	Proposed changes to the Fire and Rescue cover model, that would be subject to public consultation, involving a recommendations and considerations for changes to the Fire and Rescue Service's emergency response model. The assessment has indicated that the proposals would have a net positive contribution on the climate with reductions and improvements in the council building portfolio, the reduction in Fire and Rescue Service fleet and the reduction in commuter mileage for staff.
Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the proposal, including reasons for any changes from previous versions	Community Safety Services commissioned a review of the Fire and Rescue cover model because of a long-term decline in On-Call availability, particularly during daytime hours. Reducing On-Call availability results in a reduction in day-to-day fire engine availability, increasing service overtime costs, increased emergency response times and reduced service productivity.
Proposal Explain the detail of the proposal, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	It is proposed that the Fire and Rescue Service proceed to public consultation concerning recommended changes to the Fire and Rescue cover model used within the service. The recommendations comprise core changes to the way in which some fire engines are crewed using a set of key principles which are as follows: •Reducing the use of full-time (wholetime) firefighters at nighttime and instead increasing the use of these staff during the daytime at various stations to provide more resilient daytime appliance availability and to improve firefighter productivity during the day in activities such as our prevention work. •Relying on part-time (on-call) firefighters more at night when their availability is very good. •Increasing the parity in emergency response performance between Oxford City and the other Oxfordshire districts to enable a redistribution of resources away from Oxford to provide more resilient daytime appliance availability. The resulting core response model would result in the following changes: 1.The introduction of a day shift wholetime system at Chipping Norton, Faringdon and Wallingford/Crowmarsh to crew the fire engine during the day with the current on-call crews crewing the fire engine at night. This will also allow local on-call crews to focus recruitment energies on nighttime hours. 2.The introduction of a day shift wholetime system at Bicester and Witney to crew the first fire engine in the day with the current on-call crews crewing the second fire engine during the day and both fire engines at night. 3.The building of a new fire station at Oxford Parkway to replace both Rewley Road and Kidlington fire stations. This new station would house two fire engines and a high reach appliance (hydraulic platform) with one of the fire engines crewed on a 24/7 basis by wholetime staff. The second fire engine would be crewed by day shift wholetime staff in the day and on-call crews at night with on-call staff being transferred and permanently rehomed from Kidlington Fire
Evidence / Intelligence List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposal and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on our ability to deliver our climate commitments.	The proposed Fire and Rescue cover model has been underpinned by detailed modelling undertaken on the service's behalf by a third party consultancy. The changes are desigend to provide more resilient fire egnine availability which will result in there being less need for employees to work outside of their normal shift patterns for overtime. This will reduce staff commuting and reduce the need for the service to move fire engines, reducing the mileage undertaken by these more heavily polluting/carbon emitting vehicles. Additionally, the model being proposed would reduce the building estate through combining stations, as well as delivering new fire stations helping, helping the county to improve its building estate and reduce its carbon footprint. Less fire egnines are also require in the new model, reducing the carbon footprint assopciated with fire engine supply chains as well as the mileage involved in the maintenance of those vehicles.
Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the proposal, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	No alternative stand-alone models have been fully developed and therefore the recommendations should currently be viewed alongside a 'do nothing' option.
Completed by	Jason Crapper
Climate action sign off by	
Director sign off by	
Assessment date	11/04/2025

Climate Impact Assessment tool

Assessment of impacts - *fill in the areas shaded in blue*

Report Name	Fire and Rescue Cover Model
Project Notes	Use this space for a brief overview of the project and any extra notes on things that aren't covered below (optional)
Export filename	*Fire and Rescue Cover Model CCIA 02.10.25* .png



Copy wheel to clipboard

Save wheel to desktop

Copy wheel's alt-text

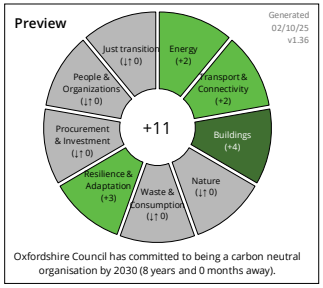
Create a pdf report

Category	Impact criteria	Score (-3 to +3) - select 0 only if not applicable	Description of impact (see guidance sheet or attached notes for more information)	Actions or mitigations to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timeline and monitoring arrangements
Energy	Increases energy efficiency	1	Reduces the size of the fire engine fleet and reduces fuel use.			
Energy	Promotes a switch to low-carbon or renewable energy	1	Enables the evolution of the estate and transition to more environmentally firendly buildings.			
Energy	Promotes resilient, local, smart energy systems	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Reduces need to travel and/or the need for private car ownership	2	Reduces the need for additional commuting journeys for employees as part of providing additional operational cover.			
Transport & Connectivity	Supports active travel	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Increases use of public transport	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Accelerates electrification of transport	N/A				
Buildings	Promotes net zero new builds and developments	2	Enables the evolution of the estate and transition to more environmentally firendly buildings.			
Buildings	Accelerates retrofitting of existing buildings	N/A				
Nature	Protects, restores or enhances biodiversity, landscape and	N/A				
Nature	Develops blue and green infrastructure	N/A				
Nature	Improves access to nature and green spaces	N/A				
Waste & Consumption	Reduces overall consumption	N/A				
Waste & Consumption	Supports waste prevention and drive reuse and recycling	N/A				
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to flooding	N/A				
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to other extreme weather events (e.g., storms, cold snaps, heatwaves, droughts)	N/A				
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience of council services, communities, energy systems, transport infrastructure and/or supply chains	3	Increases the resilience of the emergency response function in the Fire and Rescue Service.			
Procurement & Investment	Procurement practices prioritise low-carbon options, circular economy and sustainability	N/A				
Procurement & Investment	Investment being considered supports climate action/ is consistent with path to net zero	N/A				
People & Organizations	Drives behavioural change to address the climate and ecological emergency	N/A				
People & Organizations	Drives organizational and systemic change to address the climate and ecological emergency	N/A				
Just transition	Promotes green innovation and job creation	N/A				
Just transition	Promotes health and wellbeing	N/A				
Just transition	Reduces poverty and inequality	N/A				
Just transition	Promotes inclusion and participation	N/A				

Climate Impact Assessment

Summary

Directorate and Service Area	Community Safety Services, Fire and rescue Service
What is being assessed	Proposed Fire and Rescue Cover Model
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	This is a new proposed emergency response model for the Fire and Rescue Service
Summary of assessment	Proposed changes to the Fire and Rescue cover model, that would be subject to public consultation, involving a recommendations and considerations for changes to the Fire and Rescue Service's emergency response model. The assessment has indicated that the proposals would have a net positive contribution on the climate with reductions and improvements in the council building portfolio, the reduction in Fire and Rescue Service fleet and the reduction in commuter
Completed by	Jason Crapper
Climate action sign off by	
Director sign off by	
Assessment date	45758



Detail of proposal

Context / Background	Community Safety Services commissioned a review of the Fire and Rescue cover model because of a long-term decline in On-Call availability, particularly during daytime hours. Reducing On-Call availability results in a reduction in day-to-day fire engine availability, increasing service overtime costs, increased emergency response times and reduced service productivity.
Proposal	It is proposed that the Fire and Rescue Service proceed to public consultation concerning recommended changes to the Fire and Rescue cover model used within the service. The recommendations comprise core changes to the way in which some fire engines are crewed using a set of key principles which are as follows: •Reducing the use of full-time (wholetime) firefighters at nighttime and instead increasing the use of these staff during the daytime at various stations to provide more resilient daytime appliance availability and to improve firefighter productivity during the day in activities such as our prevention work. •Relying on part-time (on-call) firefighters more at night when their availability is very good. •Increasing the parity in emergency response performance between Oxford City and the other Oxfordshire districts to enable a redistribution of resources away from Oxford to provide more resilient daytime appliance availability. The resulting core response model would result in the following changes: 1.The introduction of a day shift wholetime system at Chipping Norton, Faringdon and
Evidence / Intelligence	The proposed Fire and Rescue cover model has been underpinned by detailed modelling undertaken on the service's behalf by a third party consultancy. The changes are desigend to provide more resilient fire egnine availability which will result in there being less need for employees to work outside of their normal shift patterns for overtime. This will reduce staff commuting and reduce the need for the service to move fire engines, reducing the mileage undertaken by these more heavily polluting/carbon emitting vehicles. Additionally, the model being proposed would reduce the building estate through combining stations, as well as delivering new fire stations helping, helping the county to improve its building estate and reduce its carbon footprint. Less fire egnines are also require in the new model, reducing the carbon footprint assopciated with fire engine supply chains as well as the mileage involved in the maintenance of those vehicles.
Alternatives considered / rejected	No alternative stand-alone models have been fully developed and therefore the recommendations should currently be viewed alongside a 'do nothing' option.

Category	Impact criteria	Score (-3 to +3)	Description of impact	Actions or mitigations to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timeline and monitoring arrangements
Energy	Increases energy efficiency	1	Reduces the size of the fire engine fleet and reduces fuel use.			
Energy	Promotes a switch to low-carbon or renewable energy	1	Enables the evolution of the estate and transition to more environmentally firendly buildings.			
Energy	Promotes resilient, local, smart energy systems	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Reduces need to travel and/or the need for private car ownership	2	Reduces the need for additional commuting journeys for employees as part of providing additional operational cover.			
Transport & Connectivity	Supports active travel	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Increases use of public transport	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Accelerates electrification of transport	N/A				
Buildings	Promotes net zero new builds and developments	2	Enables the evolution of the estate and transition to more environmentally firendly buildings.			
Buildings	Accelerates retrofitting of existing buildings	N/A				
Nature	Protects, restores or enhances biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems	N/A				
Nature	Develops blue and green infrastructure	N/A				
Nature	Improves access to nature and green spaces	N/A				
Waste & Consumption	Reduces overall consumption	N/A				
Waste & Consumption	Supports waste prevention and drive reuse and recycling	N/A				
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to flooding	N/A				
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to other extreme weather events (e.g., storms, cold snaps, heatwaves, droughts)	N/A				
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience of council services, communities, energy systems, transport infrastructure and/or supply chains	3	Increases the resilience of the emergency response function in the Fire and Rescue Service.			
Procurement & Investment	Procurement practices prioritise low-carbon options, circular economy and sustainability	N/A				
Procurement & Investment	Investment being considered supports climate action/ is consistent with path to net zero	N/A				
People & Organizations	Drives behavioural change to address the climate and ecological emergency	N/A				
People & Organizations	Drives organizational and systemic change to address the climate and ecological emergency	N/A				
Just transition	Promotes green innovation and job creation	N/A				
Just transition	Promotes health and wellbeing	N/A				
Just transition	Reduces poverty and inequality	N/A				

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CABINET

21 APRIL 2026

Oxford congestion charge investment plan

Report by Director for Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

   a) approve "part 1" of the congestion charge investment plan, as detailed at Annex 1 and outlined in paragraph 23

   b) approve "part 2" of the congestion charge investment plan, as detailed at Annex 1 and outlined in paragraph 23

   c) confirm that allocations to specific projects or schemes in line with the areas of spend identified in Part 2 of the investment plan (including the reserve) can be made under the delegation authorised by resolution (e) of the 10 September 2025 cabinet decision:
   - *delegate approval for future surplus investment to the Director for Environment and Highways, in consultation with the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Cabinet Member for Transport Management and Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation.*

Executive Summary

2. This report sets out the proposed investment plan for surplus congestion charge income and explains why the Director for Environment and Highways has referred the investment plan to cabinet rather than using delegated powers cabinet authorised in September 2025 when approving the scheme.

3. The reason for referral back to cabinet is a higher-than-expected available surplus along with the scale and range of options now available.

4. Officers' recommendations for the use of surplus income are set out at Annex 1.

Background

5. Cabinet approved the temporary congestion charge on 10 September 2025 in response to congestion impacts associated with the Botley Road closure. At that time, Cabinet resolved to delegate approval of future surplus investment, subject to consultation with senior officers and relevant Cabinet Members.

6. The charge came into operation on 29 October 2025 and is expected to operate until the reopening of Botley Road, currently anticipated by 31 August 2026.

7. The surplus from the congestion charge was initially estimated at £3.2m over a ten-month period. Updated forecasts based on early operational data now indicate a potential surplus of approximately £4.5m over the same period, although this remains subject to change as further data becomes available. This forecast is derived from income from daily charge payments and penalty charges, minus operating costs.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

8. By law, any surplus generated by a congestion charging scheme may only be spent for the purpose of directly or indirectly facilitating the achievement of the authority's local transport policies.

9. In Oxfordshire, the relevant policies are set out in the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP). All proposed investments must therefore demonstrably support the policy objectives outlined in these documents.

Recommended Investment Plan

10. The total surplus income is currently forecast to be £4.53m. With £1.34m having been spent or committed through previous decision-making, this leaves a forecast surplus of £3.19m currently unallocated.

11. Officers have considered several different potential investment initiatives and different combinations of those investments.

12. This was carried out taking into account:
    - transport benefits, including impacts on city centre visitor numbers
    - the requirement for all expenditure to comply with the Transport Act 2000 requirements
    - ongoing monitoring of the temporary congestion charge
    - the 2025 Citizens' Assembly's transport recommendations
    - the consultation on the temporary congestion charge
    - equality and inclusion impacts
    - climate impacts
    - the balance between immediate and longer-term benefits

    officers are recommending a package of investment as outlined at Table 3 and at Annex 1.

13. When considering the investment plan proposal, officers have been very mindful that the free park and ride return bus travel scheme appears to have been well-received by the public and is now operating effectively, is well-understood by

users, and is clear and simple to communicate. It is also considered to be helping to maintain city centre footfall. Whilst the evidence to date suggests the congestion charge itself has had a far greater impact on traffic levels in the city than free park and ride, the free park and ride offer has undoubtedly contributed. Officers consider that no other use of the congestion charge income would result in equivalent or greater traffic reduction benefits.

14. It is appreciated that whilst park and ride trips help reduce traffic in Oxford, a car trip is still involved, making park and ride a less sustainable option than using a local bus service or active travel for the whole journey. However, a key advantage of park and ride is that it is available to virtually all drivers coming into Oxford from outside the city, regardless of where they start their journey. This maximises the potential for behaviour change.

15. Although it is not generally used by Oxford residents, park and ride has been seen as beneficial to Oxford for over 50 years by Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council. The city council itself built 3500 park and ride spaces during that time, including the £5m expansion of Seacourt in 2021, a project which aimed to "reduce traffic and congestion in Botley Road and the city centre".

16. Even with the free park and ride bus offer, there has been good patronage growth on local bus services. There has been an 8 per cent growth since the introduction of the congestion charge. A third of this increase is on park and ride services with the remaining two-thirds on non-park and ride services, with significant growth on routes serving the city from other areas like Didcot, Abingdon and Wallingford. There is no evidence to suggest "extraction" from local bus services to park and ride.

17. The park and ride offer has also helped create favourable network and commercial conditions which allow bus operators to expand their network to include more marginal routes without financial support from the council. Routes 20 and 3A, linking Rose Hill to the John Radcliffe hospital and Oxford station respectively, are good examples of this. Oxford Bus Company's statement from their perspective, regarding the impact of the removal of the free park and ride offer and potential commercial decisions regarding bus services they would make in response, is at Annex 2.

18. Officers have also been conscious regarding the need to consider the transition from the temporary congestion charge scheme to the traffic filter trial in respect of any initiatives ending or starting.

19. In this report, all costs quoted for the free park and ride scheme are the **difference** between the cost of the previous discounted combined park and ride ticket scheme which ran from October 2022 until October 2025, and the cost of offering free park and ride. The annual cost of the previous scheme to the county council was £865,000 (£72,000 per month). Oxford City Council also contributed to the previous scheme and has agreed to continue to do so; its contribution is £1 per free ticket issued at three park and ride sites it operates, which is forecast to average around £50,000 per month.

20. Table 1 shows the actual and forecast income and expenditure to **31 May 2026**. This is the investment that has been agreed by the Director for Environment and Highways in consultation with responsible cabinet members using the powers delegated by cabinet at its September 2025 meeting.

***Table 1** – congestion charge income, operating costs and confirmed free park and ride allocation to 31 May 2026 (£'000)*

Period	Gross income	Operating costs	Surplus	Free P&R offer*	Residual surplus
Nov 25 – Feb 26 (actual)	2583	-910	1674	-733	940
Mar – May 26 (forecast)	2178	-491	1687	-609	1077
Total	**4761**	**-1400**	**3360**	**-1343**	**2017**

*excess cost vs previous park and ride offer, see paragraph 19

21. Table 2 shows the forecast income, operating costs and surplus from 1 June to 31 August 2026.

***Table 2** – forecast congestion charge income and operating costs from 1 June to 31 August 2026, and total forecast surplus to 31 August 2026 (£'000)*

Period	Gross income	Operating costs	Surplus
Residual surplus carried forward from Nov-May	**-**	**-**	**2017**
1 June – 31 August	**1607**	**-434**	**1173**
Total			**3190**

22. The total forecast unallocated surplus is therefore **£3.19m**. This is a forecast; the actual surplus will depend on the actual charge payments, penalty charges and operating costs in the coming months, including variances in penalty charge cancellation rates.

23. Table 3 shows the officer recommended allocations for Parts 1 and 2 of the investment plan. Scheme details the supporting rationale are at Annex 1.

***Table 3** – recommended investment plan (1 June – 31 December 2026)*

Item	Duration	Allocation (£'000)
Part 1		
Free P&R return bus offer*	7 months from 1 June 2026	1290
Part 1 total		**1290**
Part 2		
Free weekday P&R parking for NHS and school staff based in Oxford *(for commuting/business travel only)*	9 months from 1 June 2026	120
Free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff based in Oxford *(for commuting/business travel only)*	9 months from 1 June 2026	670

Item	Duration	Allocation (£'000)
Hospital express P&R services	12 months from 1 October 2026	1000
Active travel infrastructure	Not applicable	500
Free bus travel for "Connect to Work" programme participants 2026/7	Six months per participant, 2026/7	100
Reserve	Not applicable	500
Part 2 total		**2890**
Grand total, Parts 1 & 2		**4180**

*excess cost vs previous park and ride offer, see paragraph 19

24. The allocations (£4.180m) exceed the forecast congestion charge surplus (£3.190m) by £0.990m.

25. Forecasts indicate sufficient funding will be available to cover this shortfall from surpluses generated by the zero-emission zone pilot in place since February 2022 and the traffic filter trial due to start in September 2026.

Comments checked by:
Filipp Skiffins, Finance Business Partner

Other options considered but not recommended

26. Significant universal city or countywide fare reductions are not feasible due to the very high costs. For example:

- Countywide £2 fare cap - £9m/year
- Countywide £2.50 fare cap - £5.75m/year
- £1 single fare cap within Oxford SmartZone - £15.5m/year

27. Much smaller universal fare discounts could be offered within the available budget, but are considered unlikely to significantly increase bus use.

Other options considered

28. Officers recommend allocating the available funding to Parts 1 and 2 of the investment plan as shown in above paragraphs, with the free park and ride return bus offer in place until 31 December 2026.

29. An alternative to Part 1 would be to end the free park and ride return bus offer sooner and revert to a combined ticket offer from 1 June 2026.

30. Annex 3 shows the "savings" (compared to the recommended plan) that would result from different combined park and ride ticket offers, along with recommendations for how those savings could be allocated. For all combined

ticket offers, a "parking only" option would remain available. This is currently priced at £2.50/day but may change in future as part of the city and county councils' annual fees and charges reviews.

Legal Implications

31. Schedule 12 of the Transport Act 2000 requires that any surplus generated by a road user charging scheme may only be spent for the purpose of directly or indirectly facilitating the achievement of the authority's local transport policies. All spending proposals in this report comply with this requirement. Officers will continue to apply this test to all spending as specific projects are developed.

32. It was believed some of the elements of the investment plan may have been considered subsidies for the purpose of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Having taken advice it has been concluded these will not be deemed subsidies with the exception of the active travel infrastructure scheme which could potentially be deemed a subsidy. However, if this is deemed a subsidy this could be given under the minimal financial assistance exemption.

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Regulatory)
jennifer.crouch@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

33. Implementation of the schemes in the investment plan can be accommodated within existing staffing levels.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

34. The congestion charge (and the traffic filters scheme on which the congestion charge is based) has been designed over a number of years to be equitable and inclusive, and the same is true of the recommended investment plan.

35. An equality impact assessment is at Annex 4, which confirms slight positive or neutral impacts for the recommended investment plan across all protected characteristics.

Sustainability Implications

36. As required by legislation, the investment plan supports the achievement of the council's transport policies, primarily the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan. These policies have sustainability objectives at their core.

37. A climate impact assessment is at Annex 5 which confirms positive impacts in across all themes except buildings (neutral impact).

Risk Management

38. At the programme level, the key risk is that insufficient funds are available to deliver the investment plan. This would mean removing or re-scoping schemes, either in terms of the benefits offered or (where applicable) duration. Officers have mitigated this risk as follows:

- Income forecasts have been cautiously prepared with realistic allowances for operating costs and a reducing income over time in line with reducing penalty charge notice numbers, based on other similar schemes
- A reserve of £0.5m has been set aside to allow for lower-than-expected income or higher-than-expected costs
- Contributions from NHS trusts to the schemes benefiting NHS staff are unconfirmed and have been excluded entirely, meaning those costs represent a 'worst case'

39. Risks will be managed at the scheme level for each scheme in the investment plan, in line with the council's standard practice for transport schemes.

Consultations

40. The recommended investment plan has been informed by:
- The Citizens' Panel on Transport (2025)
- Consultation on the temporary congestion charge (2025)
- Discussions with affected stakeholders (ongoing)

41. Consultation with relevant stakeholders will continue during the design and implementation phase. Statutory consultations will be required for some elements of the plan.

Paul Fermer
Director for Environment and Highways

Annex:	Annex 1 – investment plan details and rationale Annex 2 – Go Ahead statement on free park and ride Annex 3 – alternatives to Part 1 of the investment plan Annex 4 – equality impact assessment Annex 5 – climate impact assessment
Background papers:	Nil
Contact Officers:	Joanne Fellows Place Planning Manager (Central), Place Planning Aron Wisdom Programme Lead (Central), Infrastructure Delivery

March 2026

Recommended investment plan details and rationale

PART ONE

Free park and ride (P&R) return bus offer
Duration and estimated cost: 7 months from 1 June 2026; £1,290k

Scheme description: Continuation of free return bus travel for users of Oxford's park and ride sites who present a valid parking ticket.

Rationale: The scheme is simple, well-understood and available to nearly all drivers entering Oxford from outside the city. Monitoring data shows strong growth in park and ride usage and non-park and ride bus usage since the congestion charge was introduced, helping to reduce traffic entering the city while supporting the city centre economy. The scheme can be implemented quickly, uses existing (under-used) assets and aligns with consultation feedback and Citizens' Assembly recommendations.

PART TWO

Free weekday park and ride parking for NHS and school staff
Duration and estimated cost: 9 months from 1 June 2026; £120k

Scheme description: Free weekday parking at park and ride sites for NHS and school staff based in Oxford.

Rationale: NHS and school staff represent a substantial proportion of peak-time commuting traffic and often have limited flexibility in working hours and location. On-site parking at hospitals and schools is typically free or low-cost, reducing incentives to change behaviour. This measure ensures park and ride is no more expensive than existing parking options, directly targeting peak-time congestion while supporting essential public services.

NHS and education workplaces account for approximately 42% of workplace parking spaces inside the Oxford ring road, indicating the scale of peak-time travel to these sectors.

Free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff
Duration and estimated cost: 9 months from 1 June 2026; £670k

Scheme description: Free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff based in Oxford, including those travelling directly from home rather than via park and ride.

Rationale: This scheme provides an equivalent offer for staff for whom park and ride is not relevant or suitable. It complements the free park and ride parking offer and targets the same peak-time commuting trips that contribute most to congestion.

NHS and education workplaces account for approximately 42% of workplace parking spaces inside the Oxford ring road, indicating the scale of peak-time travel to these sectors.

Hospital express park and ride services
Duration and estimated cost: 12 months from 1 October 2026; £1,000k

Scheme description: Enhanced and potentially limited-stop bus services linking park and ride sites directly with major hospital destinations in Headington.

Rationale: Hospital commuting is a significant contributor to congestion on Oxford's radial routes. Faster, more direct services improve the attractiveness of park and ride for hospital staff and visitors, providing a realistic alternative to driving all the way to hospital sites.

NHS and education workplaces account for approximately 42% of workplace parking spaces inside the Oxford ring road, indicating the scale of peak-time travel to these sectors.

Active travel infrastructure
Duration: Not applicable; **Cost:** £500k

Scheme description: Funding for a package of small-scale active travel measures such as pedestrian crossings (e.g. Abingdon Road / Weirs Lane), side road entry treatments (e.g. London Road), secure cycle parking/hubs (e.g. in schools, Thornhill P&R site, Radley Station, on-street etc) and related improvements. This could also include schemes to better manage e-scooters and e-bikes

Rationale: While large infrastructure schemes are costly and slower to deliver, smaller interventions can provide targeted safety and accessibility benefits and reinforce the benefits of reduced traffic levels resulting from the congestion charge.

Free bus travel for Connect to Work programme participants
Duration and estimated cost: Six months per participant, 2026/27; £100k

Scheme description: Up to six months of free bus travel for participants in the Connect to Work programme.

Rationale: The cost of travel can be a barrier to entering employment or training. This targeted measure supports inclusion and access to work and indirectly facilitates the achievement of local transport policies.

Reserve
Duration: Not applicable; **Cost:** £500k

Scheme description: Contingency allocation retained within the investment plan.

Rationale: Congestion charge income remains a forecast. The reserve provides flexibility to manage lower-than-expected income or higher-than-expected costs and allows schemes to be scaled or adjusted as more information becomes available.

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Go Ahead statement on their commercial considerations if the free park and ride offer is not approved

April 2026

1. When the congestion charge was implemented, bus operators re-timed their services to reflect the expected improvement in running speeds that would result. Go-Ahead implemented timetable changes from 9 November 2025, and Stagecoach from 30 November 2025. These changes benefitted services across the city, with faster scheduled running times and improved frequencies at peak times, where pre-congestion charge running times had been worst.
2. Both bus operators committed to the council to re-invest all vehicle and driver resources saved from these timetables changes into additional services for the city. Go-Ahead implemented improvements in the following areas:
    - Improved bus services for Littlemore - this included the enhancement of service 5A from every 30 minutes to every 20 minutes on Mondays to Fridays and from every 60 minutes to every 30 minutes on Monday to Friday evenings and the extension of service 3A to the rail station up to every 15 minutes.
    - Improved bus services to East Oxford hospitals - this included the enhancement of service 700 from every 30 minutes to every 20 minutes on Mondays to Fridays, and from every 60 minutes to every 30 minutes on weekends; the improvement of service 100 to operate up to every 20 minutes, with the route enhanced to serve Wood Farm, Cowley Road and the city centre, and the introduction of an every 30 minute weekend service; and the introduction of new service 20, providing regular links from Rose Hill and Iffley Road to Brookes University and the hospitals on Mondays to Fridays, which had previously been highlighted by the council as a gap in the network.
    - Restoration of links previously lost to congestion - this included the restoration of the link from Rose Hill and Iffley Road to the rail station via service 3; and the re-introduction of night bus services on the Iffley Road on Monday to Saturday nights.
    - In total, 7 vehicles were re-invested into the network by Go-Ahead to deliver these improvements.
3. Stagecoach also made improvements to their commercial network, focused on improved cross-city links from North Oxford and improvements to Park & Ride connectivity.

4. Following the introduction of these timetable improvements, it quickly became clear that, while in some areas of the city traffic conditions improved broadly in line with modelling, and others supported by the free P&R offer (such as Abingdon Road and London Road) performed slightly better; in other areas such as Iffley Road, Marston Ferry Road and roads around Temple Cowley, improvements in bus running times were not observed at the levels anticipated.

5. As a result, punctuality on Go-Ahead's network during November and December 2025 worsened materially and reached unsustainable levels, with punctuality on service 700 (which had received 2 of the re-invested vehicles) being 60.81% on time in November 2025, service 100 (which received 1 re-invested vehicle) being 68.47% on time in November 2025, and service 3A (which received 1 re-invested vehicle) being 55.20% on time in the same month. This punctuality level was not sustainable for Go-Ahead, as it risked regulatory action against its operator's licence, and therefore the operator sought to engage with the county council's public transport team to make changes to the implemented timetables as a matter of urgency.

6. Go-Ahead also suffered significant customer complaints during this period related to late running and slower than timetabled journeys in some parts of the city, including from a key "business to business" customer in the form of Oxford Science Park. As a result of this particular complaint, Go-Ahead invested an additional vehicle which had not been saved from the productivity improvements, and which did not attract any subsidy from the county council or any other party to re-instate service 3X to the Science Park from 7th December 2025.

7. From 22nd February 2026, Go-Ahead made a number of further timetable changes to address the punctuality challenges being experienced. This included the addition of a further vehicle to service 700, to address the punctuality challenges seen on that route; with this vehicle being sourced from the withdrawal of the route 3A between Cowley Lidl and Kassam stadium. It was felt that this link was no longer essential, due to improvements made by Stagecoach to service 600 as part of their response to the congestion charge, though this change has generated further complaints from residents of Greater Leys which have been taken up by the local MP. Following this change, punctuality on service 700 has improved but remains below Go-Ahead's target level.

8. In addition, as part of the 22nd February changes, Go-Ahead re-timed its longer-distance services, which had not been adjusted in the 9th November amendments. This took into account real-world experience of operating the bus network with the congestion charge and free P&R promotion in place, and saw substantial journey time improvements being provided on services using

the Abingdon Road, benefitting bus users in Abingdon, Wallingford, Didcot and other area in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse served by these routes.

9. Since the 22nd February changes, punctuality of Go-Ahead's city services has improved to an overall acceptable level of approximately 81% on time.

10. Go-Ahead operate the majority of services to Park & Ride sites in Oxford and have observed an increase of approximately 11,000 return journeys per week using these services since the introduction of the congestion charge and free Park & Ride bus travel. The operator believes this to be contributing approximately a 1% improvement in overall running time across its Oxford city network, though the benefits of this vary between different corridors. Go-Ahead's network includes 23 buses per hour on Abingdon Road, which has been the corridor benefitting the most from free P&R and this is the reason why this particular operator has identified this to be the case for its services.

11. In total, since the introduction of the congestion charge and free Park & Ride promotion, Go-Ahead has seen approximately 2% improvement in overall running time across its Oxford city network, compared to the equivalent period last year. Go Ahead therefore believes that on average across its network, the free P&R promotion is contributing around half of the overall improvement in running time it is seeing, with the remainder coming from the congestion charge scheme.

12. Currently, Go-Ahead is observing approximately 5% improvement in running time on its city network against a 2019 baseline. This is significantly less than the 10% improvement which was committed to by the County Council in the Oxfordshire Enhanced Bus Partnership, and which formed a key part of the business case for bus operators to invest over £45m in zero emission vehicles and charging infrastructure as part of the ZEBRA project. At present, bus operators have not sought to take any action against the council due to the non-achievement of this target. However, there is a legal risk to the council that operators may seek to enforce their rights under the Enhanced Partnership Agreement, should the council seek to pursue policies which materially worsen bus productivity from current levels.

13. Should the cabinet decide not to continue with the free P&R bus travel promotion, Go-Ahead believes that bus speeds on its network will worsen by approximately 1% in the Oxford city area. If this were to occur, it would be necessary for Go-Ahead to once again re-time services across the city, plus longer-distance services that were improved from 22nd February to reflect the expected slower journey times that would result, to take account of the expected reduction in bus patronage that would result from less attractive journey times (in particular on Abingdon Road), and the additional operating

costs of each journey which would be caused by the less productive vehicle resource.

14. In addition to extending journey times across most bus services in the city, additional targeted changes would be required to free up the vehicle resource and associated operating costs, to invest in delivering these longer journey times. These targeted changes would be likely to result in the following:

    1. Withdrawal of service 20, which while building well, is not likely to be capable in its own right of supporting its full operational costs.
    2. Withdrawal of service 3 and 3A from Oxford rail station.
    3. Withdrawal of N3 night bus service
    4. Reduction of service 5A evenings from every 30 minutes to every 60 minutes
    5. Reduction in current number of timetabled journeys on N400 night bus service to Thame.

Alternatives considered to Part 1 of the recommended investment plan

Alternative option	Description	SAVING vs recommended plan 1 June to 31 December (£000) 3% inflation applied to bus operator reimbursement rate Allowance made for continuation of free P&R for NHS and school staff
A	**Pre-congestion charge P&R offer** (In place from October 2022 to October 2025) Parking + return bus for 1 adult and up to 3 children: **£4** Parking + return bus for 2 adults and up to 3 children: **£5**	905
	Simplified "per car" offer (parking + return bus travel for up to five people travelling together)	
B	£3	193
C	£4	578
D	£5	964

Note: for all the above options, the "parking only" fee would remain £2.50 (unless varied in future by the city and county councils through changes to fees and charges).

Go Ahead have agreed to hold current reimbursement rates if free P&R continues until December 2026, but this is unusual as rates would normally be reviewed each year. Inflation at 3% has therefore been added to the reimbursement rate for all alternative options, which erodes some of the savings.

The savings also assume free P&R travel continues for NHS and school staff which further erodes the projected savings, albeit to a lesser extent than the added inflation.

If cabinet decides to substitute the Part 1 of the recommended investment plan with one of the alternative options (A) to (D) above, officers recommend the savings are allocated as shown below, with final allocations made by the Director for Environment and Highways under the powers delegated by cabinet at its September 2025 meeting.

- Additional active travel infrastructure – 25%
- Public transport infrastructure – 25%

- Additional bus fare discounts – 50%, including one or more of the following (subject to available funding):
  - Trial bus season ticket discounts
  - Under-19 bus fare discounts
  - Discounted group bus tickets
  - Expansion of concessionary bus pass scheme for people with disabilities to allow free travel before 9am

Oxfordshire County Council

Equalities Impact Assessment

Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan

7 April 2026

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan – proposed investment of surplus congestion charge income into Park and Ride, bus, active travel and related supporting measures. It is acknowledged that the current version of the Investment Plan does not specify detailed schemes in all instances. Consequently, the assessment reflects the high-level detail provided. In addition, further scheme-specific assessments should be undertaken as the programme develops and individual measures are defined.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	A new investment plan linked to the congestion charge, within an existing wider policy context of congestion reduction and support for sustainable travel in Oxford.
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	The plan would use surplus congestion charge income to support a package of measures intended to reduce reliance on private car travel and improve access to Oxford by bus, Park and Ride and active travel. The package includes a proposed Part 1 Park and Ride offer and a wider set of Part 2 measures covering staff travel support, hospital access, active travel and access to employment. Overall, the assessment indicates positive equalities impacts, particularly through supporting public transport use and active travel options, although the scale of impact will depend on uptake, detailed delivery and the final decision on the Part 1 offer.
Completed By	Steer
Authorised By	OCC

Date of Assessment	7 April 2026

Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	OCC has commissioned an EqIA and CIA to support the Cabinet decision on the Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan. The assessments cover both the recommended schemes and the alternative options within the investment plan, and consider both individual and cumulative impacts. The plan is structured in two parts, with Part 1 focused on the Park and Ride offer and Part 2 covering supporting measures, including staff travel support, hospital access, active travel and access to employment.
Proposals Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	The Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan would use surplus congestion charge income to fund a package of transport interventions intended to reduce car trips into Oxford and support lower-carbon travel. Part 1 remains subject to Cabinet decision and relates to the Park and Ride fare offer. The recommended option is a free Park and Ride return bus offer, although alternative Park and Ride pricing options are also under consideration. The package includes four main types of intervention. Fare-based and access measures include the proposed free Park and Ride return bus offer, free weekday Park and Ride parking for NHS and school staff, free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff, and free bus travel for Connect to Work participants. Service provision and network enhancements comprise the proposed hospital express Park and Ride services. Active travel and enabling infrastructure would fund small-scale measures such as cycle parking and minor infrastructure upgrades. A reserve is also included to manage income risk and provide flexibility to extend or rescope measures if required.
Evidence / Intelligence	The assessment is informed by discussion with Oxfordshire County Council officers during development of the Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan, including consideration of the different package options and the measures considered most appropriate for inclusion. This has included review of the proposed Park and Ride offer,

List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our equality commitments.	targeted staff travel support, hospital express Park and Ride services, active travel infrastructure, free bus travel for Connect to Work participants, and the alternative Part 1 options and reinvestment approach set out in the plan. At this stage, the EIA is therefore based primarily on the design and intended purpose of the proposed measures, and on officer input regarding how the package has been developed and refined. The assessment remains qualitative and proportionate to the current stage of development, recognising that some delivery details remain to be confirmed and that further scheme-specific assessment may be required as the programme progresses.
Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	The principal alternatives considered relate to Part 1 of the investment plan, where four alternatives to the recommended free Park and Ride return bus offer have been identified. These options would generate different levels of savings, which could be reinvested in active travel, public transport infrastructure and additional fare discounts. A do-nothing approach would mean that surplus congestion charge income is not used to strengthen sustainable travel alternatives and would therefore not support the purpose of the investment plan.

Section 3: Impact Assessment

Overview

This section presents a summary review of the Investment Plan on a 'package' basis – for assessments of each proposed scheme, please see Appendix A. The classification of impacts used for the assessment is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Impact scoring framework

Score	Impact
-3	Large adverse
-2	Moderate adverse
-1	Slight adverse
0	Neutral – no significant benefits or disbenefits
1	Slight beneficial
2	Moderate beneficial
3	Large beneficial

Summary Review - Protected Characteristics, Additional Community Impacts, Additional Wider Impacts

	Part 1 – Option A	**Part 1** – Option B	**Part 2** - Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements	**Part 2** - Active Travel and Enabling Infrastructure	**Part 2** Fare-Based and Access Measures	**Comment**	**Actions or mitigations, action owner and timescales and monitoring**
Age	1	-1	1	2	1	Part 1 Option B may present a negative adverse impact for older or younger lone car drivers in comparison to the	See Table 10, Appendix A

	Part 1 – Option A	**Part 1** – Option B	**Part 2** - Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements	**Part 2 -** Active Travel and Enabling Infrastructure	**Part 2** Fare-Based and Access Measures	**Comment**	**Actions or mitigations, action owner and timescales and monitoring**
						original P&R fare charging structure.	
Disability	1	-1	1	2	1	Part 1 Option B may present a negative adverse impact for older or younger lone car drivers in comparison to the original P&R fare charging structure.	See Table 10, Appendix A
Gender Reassignment	0	0	0	0	0		
Marriage & Civil Partnership	0	0	0	0	0		
Pregnancy and Maternity	1	0	1	1	1		
Race	1	0	0	1	0		
Sex	1	0	1	1	1		
Sexual Orientation	0	0	0	0	0		
Religion or Belief	0	0	0	0	0		

	Part 1 – Option A	**Part 1** – Option B	**Part 2** - Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements	**Part 2** - Active Travel and Enabling Infrastructure	**Part 2** Fare-Based and Access Measures	**Comment**	**Actions or mitigations, action owner and timescales and monitoring**
Rural communities	1	-1	1	1	1	Part 1 Option B may present a negative adverse impact for older or younger lone car drivers in comparison to the original P&R fare charging structure.	See Table 10, Appendix A
Armed Forces	0	0	0	0	0		
Carers	1	-1	0	1	1	Part 1 Option B may present a negative adverse impact for older or younger lone car drivers in comparison to the original P&R fare charging structure. Though some carers may benefit from reduced journey times, or less complex journeys, some bus priority measures may increase congestion and journey times for some car users, particularly where alternative capacity is limited.	See Table 10, Appendix A
Areas of deprivation	1	0	1	1	1		

	Part 1 – Option A	**Part 1** – Option B	**Part 2** - Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements	**Part 2** - Active Travel and Enabling Infrastructure	**Part 2** Fare-Based and Access Measures	**Comment**	**Actions or mitigations, action owner and timescales and monitoring**
Refugees, Asylum seekers and Undocumented migrants (i.e. vulnerable migrants	0	0	0	1	0		
Socio-Economic Duty	1	0	1	1	1		
Staff	0	0	0	0	0		
Other Council Services	0	0	0	0	1		
Providers	0	0	0	0	0		
Social Value [1]	2	0	2	2	2	Improved transport provision is expected to generate positive social value by enhancing access to employment, education, and essential services, particularly for underserved communities. It may also support wider economic inclusion, community	

[1] If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area

	Part 1 – Option A	**Part 1** – Option B	**Part 2** - Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements	**Part 2 -** Active Travel and Enabling Infrastructure	**Part 2** Fare-Based and Access Measures	**Comment**	**Actions or mitigations, action owner and timescales and monitoring**
						wellbeing, and opportunities for local businesses and social enterprises. It is assumed all positive impacts will generate social value.	

ANNEX 4

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	
Person Responsible for Review	
Authorised By	

Appendix A – Assessment

Investment Plan - Part One: Overview

Part One of the recommended Investment Plan, as outlined in the Cabinet report, presents two options regarding Park & Ride charging structures. Option A, the recommended approach, proposes the continuation of the existing free Park & Ride return offer. Option B sets out alternative charging structures for the Park & Ride service, to be considered in the event that Cabinet does not approve the recommended option.

Option A: Free P&R return bus offer

Table 2: Option A: Free P&R return bus offer

Scheme Description	User Impact	Impact Overview
Continuation of free return bus travel from all Park & Ride sites - 7 months from 1 June 2026	• Age • Disability • Pregnancy and Maternity • Race • Sex • Rural Communities • Areas of Deprivation • Carers	• Reduces travel costs and improves access to Oxford city centre for Park & Ride users.

Assessment

Age: There may be a disproportionately positive impact for older adults (45+) as they are more car-dependent than other age groups, with 62% of 45–59-year-olds in Oxfordshire using a car to travel to work (2011 Census). Free Park & Ride offers an affordable alternative to using a car for the entire journey; improving access to Oxford city centre whilst reducing car trips.
There may also be a disproportionately positive impact for younger people (16–24) are more likely to walk or cycle (38% in Oxford, 2011 Census). Younger people may benefit from the indirect impact of fewer numbers of private vehicles which could improve the experience and/or perception of active travel.

Disability: Approximately 15% of Oxford study area residents report a long-term health problem or disability (2021 Census, Oxford). People with mobility difficulties nationally have slightly higher car usage (62% disabled vs 60% non-disabled) and lower walking/cycling rates (24%

disabled vs 31% non-disabled) (National Travel Survey, 2022, England). Free Park & Ride offers an accessible alternative for those who are less able to walk or cycle for some or all of their journeys. In addition, disabled people with impairments that make longer journeys less comfortable may experience more comfortable travel due to reduced congestion, as the scheme encourages alternatives to private vehicle use.

Pregnancy and Maternity: Free Park & Ride may provide more flexible, and cost-free travel for pregnant women, Women nationally are more likely to use public transport (22% women vs 15% for men). In addition, this may also provide a more flexible option for parents travelling with infants, supporting access to work and services.

Race / Ethnicity: National data shows ethnic minorities are slightly more likely to walk or cycle (36% ethnic minority groups vs 32% non ethnic minority groups) and slightly less likely to use a car (59% ethnic minority groups vs 63% non-ethnic minority) (National Travel Survey, 2022). Ethnic minority groups may benefit from the indirect impact of fewer numbers of private vehicles which could improve the experience and/or perception of active travel.

Sex: Women nationally are more likely to use public transport (22% vs 15% for men) (National Travel Survey, 2022, England) and women tend to make more complex trips involving caregiving or shopping. Therefore, free Park & Ride may support more convenient, lower-cost travel that reduces reliance on private car usage.

Rural Communities: One-third of Oxfordshire's population live in rural areas (DEFRA, 2021) where car dependence is higher. The scheme is likely to have a disproportionately positive impact by providing rural residents with affordable access to Oxford city centre and helping reduce overall car trips.

Carer: Oxfordshire has 61,100 unpaid carers, with 17,400 providing 20+ hours/week (Census 2011, Oxfordshire). Carers often face complex travel needs while balancing work and caring responsibilities. The scheme is likely to have a disproportionately positive impact by easing travel burdens by providing a lower cost form of travel, which may enable greater participation in employment, education, and social activities.

Socio Economic Duty: Continuing the free Park & Ride scheme is likely to have a disproportionately positive impact on residents experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. Though households in deprived areas often have lower car ownership (ONS, 2021, Oxford), free Park & Ride can reduce travel costs for more deprived households with car ownership, which may improve access to employment, education, and essential services.

Option B: P&R charging structures

Table 3: Option B: P&R charging structures

Scheme Description	User Impact	Impact Overview
Option B: P&R charging structures that could replace the free P&R return bus offer If an alternative P&R charging option is chosen, the resulting savings would be reinvested into transport improvements: 25% for active travel infrastructure, 25% for public transport infrastructure, and 50% for additional bus fare discounts (such as season ticket trials, youth fares, group tickets, or extended concessions for disabled users).	• Disability • Age • Pregnancy and maternity • Carers • Rural Communities	• Reintroduces/Introduces a Park & Ride offer requiring some user financial contribution • Potential reinvestment of savings into user discounts • Potential reallocation of savings into active travel and public transport improvements

Assessment

Changes from the baseline Park & Ride fare structure to simplified per-car tariffs (£3–£5 per car for up to five passengers) affect travel costs for different users depending on how many people share the trip. The price of P&R tickets provide a single adult return with parking included (£4), or up to two adults with children (£5), meaning the unit cost per traveller varies by household size (see **LINK**).

While there is no direct evidence on the proportion of people who travel unaccompanied in Oxford/Oxfordshire, baseline travel data shows that car travel is common and that travel modes vary by demographic group. Where travel is undertaken by car, a simplified per-car fare structure will have different disproportionate impacts depending on how many people share the vehicle, and the characteristics of the solo driver.

Groups that are identified as potentially affected by higher per-car fares are those for whom car travel is either a frequent mode or where typical trip patterns (e.g., commuting, caregiving) may involve solo travel or small household travel may include:

- Younger or older people travelling independently for work, education, or leisure
- Disabled people whose travel may require individualised arrangements
- Carers travelling alone with dependants
- Parents travelling alone with younger children
- People from rural communities who are more likely to be car dependent and therefore more likely to make solo car journeys

- People from lower income households who rely on car travel

Individuals with multiple overlapping characteristics, such as a disabled adult living in a rural area or a lone carer, may experience the highest cumulative negative impacts because they are more likely to travel alone and have limited alternatives.

However, the proposed reinvestment into public transport, fare concessions, and improved active travel infrastructure, could mitigate the effect of higher per-car fares by making alternative travel modes more accessible and convenient, while maintaining the affordability of using the Park & Ride service.

Investment Plan - Part Two Overview:

Part Two includes four primary categories of intervention:

- Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements: including proposed improvements to public transport services
- Active Travel and Enabling Infrastructure: This entails funding for small-scale initiatives, including cycle parking and minor infrastructure improvements.
- Fare-Based and Access Measures: This includes the proposed free Park and Ride return bus offer, complimentary weekday Park and Ride parking for NHS and school staff, free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff, and free bus travel for Connect to Work participants.
- Contingency Reserve: A reserve is incorporated to manage income risks and provide flexibility to extend or rescope measures, if required (not assessed)

Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements

Table 4: Bus priority / infrastructure measures (2a)

Scheme Description	User Impact	Impact Overview
For example, Bus lanes; bus gates; signal priority; P&R site infrastructure	• Disability • Age • Pregnancy and Maternity • Sex • Rural Communities • Carers	• Improved public transport infrastructure leading to journey time benefits and more comfortable journeys

Assessment

Disability, Age, and Pregnancy and Maternity: Approximately 15% of Oxford residents report a long-term health problem or disability (2021 Census). Potential positive impacts of bus priority and infrastructure improvements include faster and more reliable journeys, improved Park & Ride infrastructure such as accessible boarding points, and signal priority. These measures are expected to increase the feasibility,

affordability, and comfort of using public transport, particularly for disabled people with physical, mental, or sensory impairments, older adults with age-related mobility limitations, and pregnant people who find longer journeys less comfortable.

Sex: Women may benefit from improvements to bus infrastructure, due to gendered differences in travel behaviour. On average, in Oxford, females use public transport to travel to work more than males, at 22 per cent vs 15 per cent (2011 Census). In addition, women are more likely to undertake 'trip-chained' journeys - linking multiple purposes such as escorting children, shopping and commuting[2]. As these journeys are more complex and time-constrained, improvements to bus routes, such as express services may disproportionately benefit women compared to men.

Rural Communities: Rural residents, who make up 33% of Oxfordshire's population (DEFRA, 2021), may experience positive impacts if bus priority measures and P&R enhancements improve connectivity to Oxford city. Faster and more reliable journeys can make public transport a viable alternative to private car usage, particularly where existing public transport options are limited.

Carers: Unpaid carers often travel with dependents or combine care duties with work or education[3]. Faster and more reliable bus services, along with accessible P&R infrastructure, can reduce the time and complexity of journeys, improving affordability and feasibility for carers. Bus priority measures such as dedicated lanes can improve bus reliability; however, they may reduce road capacity for general traffic, leading to increased total travel times across the network under high demand conditions. By reallocating road space, bus priority measures can increase congestion and journey times for some car users, particularly where alternative capacity is limited, which may present a minor negative impact for some carers making journeys by private vehicles.

Socio-Economic Duty / Areas of Deprivation: Households in areas of higher deprivation are less likely to own a car and more reliant on public transport (ONS, 2021). Potential positive impacts include more reliable bus journeys and reduced travel time. This could improve access to employment, education, and services.

Table 5: New or improved bus services (2b)

Scheme Description	User Impact	Impact Overview
2b: New or improved bus services Contracted P&R or bus routes including proposed hospital express services or supported services	• Disability • Age • Pregnancy and Maternity • Sex • Rural Communities	• Improved public transport services may lead to journey time benefits and more comfortable journeys for some users.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/nts-factsheets/trip-chaining-2024

[3] https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Compendium-of-Evidence-for-Oxfordshire-Community-Services-Strategy.pdf

	• Socio-Economic Duty / Areas of Deprivation • Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Vulnerable Migrants • Carers	

Assessment

Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity: Disabled people, older adults (60+) and pregnant people may have related impairments that affect their ability to make longer or complex journeys. The introduction of new or improved bus services, including hospital-focused express routes, would increase the availability and choice of travel options. This could provide more feasible and reliable journeys, particularly for essential trips such as healthcare appointments, work, and daily errands. Express services may offer additional benefits to these individuals, as faster and more direct routes can improve journey comfort, reduce travel-related fatigue, and enhance overall accessibility.

Sex: Women may benefit from improvements to bus infrastructure, due to gendered differences in travel behaviour. On average, in Oxford, females use public transport to travel to work more than males, at 22 per cent vs 15 per cent (2011 Census). In addition, women are more likely to undertake 'trip-chained' journeys - linking multiple purposes such as escorting children, shopping and commuting[4]. As these journeys are more complex and time-constrained, improvements to bus routes, such as express services may disproportionately benefit women compared to men.

Rural Communities: Approximately 33% of Oxfordshire's population live in rural areas (DEFRA, 2021). Residents in rural locations often have fewer transport options. Expanded bus services and express routes can disproportionately benefit these groups by improving connectivity to key destinations such as hospitals, workplaces, and urban centres. Conversely, if routes are concentrated on urban corridors, rural residents may see limited benefits.

Carers: Unpaid carers in Oxfordshire (Census 2011) may have limited flexibility to travel due to caring responsibilities. Improved bus services can disproportionately positively affect carers by offering more predictable and reliable routes for essential travel, including hospital visits for those they care for. Enhanced public transport can also enable the people they care for to travel more independently for medical appointments or daily activities, reducing the carers' travel burden and supporting greater autonomy for those in their care.

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/nts-factsheets/trip-chaining-2024

Socio-Economic Duty / Areas of Deprivation: Residents in more deprived areas of Oxford have lower car ownership (ONS, 2021). Expanded bus services, supported bus services, and hospital-focused express routes could disproportionately benefit these groups by improving affordable access to essential services

Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Vulnerable Migrants: Refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants likely to rely on public transport due to limited access to private vehicles, however, public transport costs can remain prohibitive. Supported services could enhance travel feasibility, affordability, and comfort, particularly for essential trips to access services.

Active Travel and Enabling Infrastructure

Table 6: Active travel infrastructure (2c)

Scheme Description	User Impact	Impact Overview
For example, Cycle lanes, cycle parking, e-scooter/e-bike solutions	• Age • Disability • Pregnancy and Maternity • Sex • Race/ethnicity • Carers • Rural Communities	• Enhanced active travel infrastructure improves experience of active travel, increases road safety, supports active travel uptake and improves experience

Assessment

Age: Younger people (16–24) are more likely to make active trips for commuting, education, and leisure. Investment in safe and connected cycling, walking, and e-scooter infrastructure could disproportionately positively impact this group by improving journey safety, convenience, and reliability, reinforcing modal shift from private vehicles.

These improvements are also particularly important for younger children. According to the National Travel Survey (2024), 51% of trips made by children aged 5 to 10 to and from school are on foot, and these journeys are often accompanied by a parent or caregivers. This means that a large proportion of children are directly exposed to the quality and safety of the walking environment. Enhancing active travel infrastructure can therefore improve child safety, increase opportunities for independent mobility, and support physical activity and wellbeing. In addition, these journeys are often accompanied by parents or guardians, meaning improvements also reduce the time, stress and complexity associated with escorting children, while supporting a gradual transition to more independent travel as children grow older.

Disability: Approximately 15% of Oxford residents report a long-term health problem or disability, with 5% limited 'a lot' and 10% limited 'a little' in day-to-day activities (2021 Census, Oxford). Disabled people with mobility or sensory impairments are less likely to use active travel modes for longer or complex journeys (National Travel Survey, 2022, England). Investment in accessible cycling and walking infrastructure, including secure cycle parking and smooth surfaces, could disproportionately positively impact disabled people by making active travel safer, more feasible, and more comfortable.

Pregnancy and Maternity: Improvements in active travel infrastructure, alongside reduced motor traffic, could disproportionately benefit pregnant people and those with young children by making journeys safer and more comfortable, particularly for those who may find travel more physically demanding during pregnancy. This is relevant for essential trips such as attending healthcare appointments and running local errands.

Sex: Women are more likely than men to make complex, multi-purpose trips—including caregiving and shopping—which can affect their travel choices. Active travel infrastructure could disproportionately positively benefit women by enabling safer, flexible options for shorter trips that complement these responsibilities.

Race / Ethnicity: National data shows ethnic minorities are slightly more likely to walk or cycle (36% ethnic minority groups vs 32% non-ethnic minority groups) and slightly less likely to use a car (59% ethnic minority groups vs 63% non-ethnic minority) (National Travel Survey, 2022). Ethnic minority groups may benefit from improved active travel routes or infrastructure, thereby improving the experience and/or perception of active travel.

Carers: Carers often rely on private vehicles to perform caring duties, including transport to appointments, errands, and emergency trips. Safer active travel options and reduced traffic congestion could disproportionately positively impact carers, supporting them to make short journeys more efficiently and reducing reliance on private cars for some trips.

Socio-Economic Duty / Areas of Deprivation: Residents in more deprived areas of Oxford have lower car ownership (ONS, 2021). Expanded active travel routes and enhanced infrastructure could disproportionately benefit these groups by improving affordable access to essential services.

Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Vulnerable Migrants: Refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants likely to rely on public transport due to limited access to private vehicles, however, public transport costs can remain prohibitive. Expanded active travel routes and enhanced infrastructure could enhance travel feasibility, affordability, and comfort, particularly for essential trips to access services

Rural Communities

Around 33% of Oxfordshire's population live in rural areas, with many settlements located further from urban centres (DEFRA, 2021). Residents in these areas are less likely to have frequent public transport access and may rely on cars. Investment in connected, safe active travel routes to Park & Ride sites or local hubs may disproportionately positively benefit rural residents for shorter trips, though overall impact may be limited due to longer travel distances.

Fare-Based and Access Measures

Table 7: Fare and/or parking discounts (P&R services) (2d)

Scheme Description	User Impact	Impact Overview
Fare and/or parking discounts (P&R services)	• Age • Disability • Pregnancy and Maternity • Sex • Rural Communities • Carers • Areas of Deprivation • Socio Economic Duty	• Targeted fare discounts for specific groups or employers deliver direct economic benefits to individuals, creating a financial incentive to utilise the services

Assessment

Age: In Oxfordshire, car use for commuting is highest among people aged 45–59 (62%) (2011 Census, Oxfordshire) and car use remains a significant proportion of mode share for those aged 60+. Therefore, older people who drive may benefit disproportionately from reduced costs for essential trips or commuting that involves P&R services, which could support increased access to employment and services.

Disability: Disabled people are slightly more likely to rely on cars for travel (62% disabled vs 60% non-disabled) (National Travel Survey, 2022, England), which may enable access to Park & Ride where a vehicle is available. This suggests a potential disproportionate positive impact for those who can access a car, although disabled people without access to a vehicle may not benefit.

Sex: Women, who are more likely to undertake complex multi-stage or multi-purpose trips including caregiving, may disproportionately benefit from cost savings.

Rural Communities: Residents in rural areas may benefit from reduced travel costs when accessing P&R sites as a gateway to Oxford city.

Carers: Carers may benefit from discounted fares for work- or care-related trips, supporting efficiency and affordability of caring duties.

Areas of Deprivation / Socio-Economic Duty: Households with lower incomes are more likely to rely on public transport. Discounts reduce barriers to travel and may disproportionately positively impact lower-income groups, supporting the public sector duty to reduce socio-economic disadvantage (ONS, 2021).

Table 8: Fare discounts (non-P&R services) (2e)

Scheme Description	User Impact	Impact Overview
For example, Free/discounted bus travel schemes, including targeted schemes for specific employment sectors/groups travelling together/people with disabilities	• Age • Disability • Pregnancy and Maternity • Sex • Rural Communities • Carers • Areas of Deprivation • Socio Economic Duty • Other Council Services	• Targeted fare discounts for specific groups or employers deliver direct economic benefits to individuals, creating a financial incentive to utilise the services

Assessment

Age: Younger people (16–24), who are more likely to use public transport and less likely to drive (National Travel Survey, 2022, England), may experience a disproportionate positive impact, as these discounts are not dependent on car access.

Disability: Disabled people, who are less likely to use active modes and may rely on public transport where available, may benefit from improved affordability, representing a positive impact, particularly where services are accessible.

Sex: Women's higher public transport use (22% for women in comparison to 15% of men in Oxford) suggests they may benefit more directly from these discounts, particularly for multi-purpose journeys.

Carers: Carers may benefit from reduced travel costs for regular or essential journeys, particularly where they do not have access to a car, representing a potentially positive impact.

Rural Communities: While service availability may limit overall impact, these discounts are not dependent on car ownership, making them more accessible than P&R discounts where services exist.

Areas of Deprivation / Socio-Economic Duty: Lower-income households are less likely to own a car and more reliant on bus travel (ONS, 2021) The proposed investment plan measure for free bus travel for participants in the Connect to Work employment support programme to improve access to employment could disproportionately positively impact individuals in these groups by facilitating access to employment opportunities.

Refugees, Asylum Seekers & Vulnerable Migrants: Individuals are less likely to have access to private vehicles and more reliant on public transport. Non-P&R fare discounts may therefore provide a more accessible and positive benefit compared to P&R-based schemes.

Other Council Services/Providers: Proposed measures to provide free weekday bus travel for school staff would provide a disproportionate economic benefit for staff employed by schools.

Cumulative impacts

Table 9: Scheme cumulative impacts

Impact	Summary
Resulting mode shift from Investment Plan measures results in reduced congestion from private vehicles	• Investments will likely encourage behaviour change and lead to some modal shift towards more sustainable methods of travel. • This behaviour change is likely to lead to a reduction in motor traffic on the highway network, in turn influencing air quality and safety outcomes, alongside improved journey times for people who continue to drive into the city centre.

Assessment

Air Quality and Health Outcomes (Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity): Investment Plan measures are likely to encourage modal shift towards more sustainable travel, reducing motor traffic and improving air quality. This may disproportionately positively impact older people (60+), who are more vulnerable to air pollution and associated conditions such as stroke and cognitive decline. It may also disproportionately benefit disabled people, noting that 15% of Oxford residents report a long-term health condition (2021 Census, Oxford), particularly those with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions. Pregnant people may also benefit from reduced exposure to air pollution, which is linked to risks such as premature birth and low birth weight. Younger people and children may additionally benefit from improved air quality, given increased susceptibility to long-term health impacts.

Road Safety (Age): Reduced traffic volumes are likely to improve road safety conditions. This may disproportionately positively impact younger people, who are more likely to walk or cycle (National Travel Survey, 2022, England) and are therefore more exposed to road collision risk.

Journey Time and Reliability (Carers, Rural Communities, Drivers): Reduced congestion may improve journey times and reliability for those who continue to travel by car. This may disproportionately positively impact carers, of whom there are 61,100 in Oxfordshire (Census 2011), who often rely on private vehicles to undertake time-sensitive and essential journeys. Rural residents, who are more likely to be car-dependent may also therefore benefit if they continue to make journeys via private vehicle.

Summary Assessment

The Investment Plan is expected to generate predominantly positive outcomes by supporting modal shift towards sustainable travel, improving accessibility, reducing congestion, and enhancing air quality and road safety. Targeted interventions, including Park & Ride (P&R) schemes, bus service improvements, active travel infrastructure, and discounted fares, are likely to disproportionately benefit specific groups, including older adults, younger people, disabled people, pregnant people, women, carers, rural residents, and socio-economically disadvantaged households.

Table 10: Potential Negative Impact

Scheme / Measure	Potential Negative Impact	Mitigation Measures
Part 1, Option B: Park & Ride Charging Structures	Introduction of per-car charges may increase travel costs for solo drivers or small household trips, potentially limiting access to P&R services for those reliant on private vehicles. Individuals affected may include: • Younger or older adults travelling independently • Disabled individuals requiring individualised travel arrangements- Carers travelling alone with dependents • Rural residents with high car dependency • Low-income, car-dependent households	• Establish ongoing monitoring of usage patterns and equity outcomes, with the flexibility to adjust fare structures or concessions if unintended barriers emerge. • Communicate changes clearly to affected users to ensure awareness of available concessions and alternatives.
Part 2 – Public Transport Service Provision and Network Enhancements	• Though some carers may benefit from reduced journey times, or less complex journeys, some bus priority measures may increase congestion and journey times for some car users, particularly where alternative capacity is limited	• Roll out bus priority schemes in phases with ongoing monitoring of congestion impacts, and adjust measures based on real-world data

Additional Considerations

While not identified as direct negative impacts, the following factors should be monitored and considered during implementation to ensure equitable outcomes:

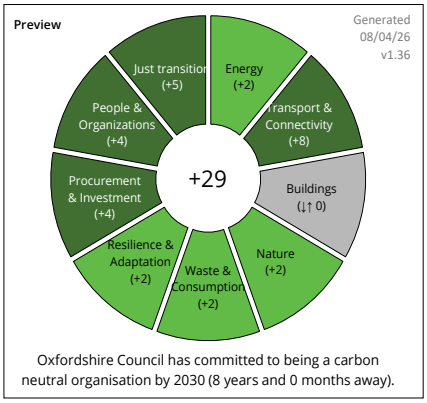
- Bus Services (2b: New or Improved Routes): Urban corridor focus may limit benefits for rural residents. Consideration should be given to rural connectivity and demand-responsive solutions.
- Active Travel Infrastructure (2c): Longer travel distances in rural areas may reduce uptake of walking, cycling, or e-scooter travel. Integration with public transport is recommended to support accessibility.
- Park & Ride / Parking Discounts (Option A & Discount Schemes): Benefits are dependent on car ownership; complementary public transport discounts should be promoted to ensure access for non-car users.
- Cumulative Impacts: Equity of access for individuals unable or unwilling to use alternative modes should be monitored, particularly for rural communities and those with mobility constraints.
- In addition, it is acknowledged that the Investment Plan does not specify detailed schemes in all instances. Further scheme-specific assessments should be undertaken as the programme develops and individual measures are defined.

Climate Impact Assessment

ANNEX 5

Summary

Directorate and Service Area	
What is being assessed	Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan – proposed investment of surplus congestion charge income into Park and Ride, bus, active travel and related supporting measures.
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	A new investment plan linked to the congestion charge, within an existing wider policy context of congestion reduction and support for sustainable travel in Oxford.
Summary of assessment	The plan would use surplus congestion charge income to support a package of measures intended to reduce reliance on private car travel and improve access to Oxford by bus, Park and Ride and active travel. The package includes a proposed Part 1 Park and Ride offer and a wider set of Part 2 measures covering staff travel support, hospital access, active travel and access to employment. Overall, the assessment indicates a positive climate effect, particularly through supporting public transport use, active travel and lower-car travel, although the scale of impact will depend on uptake, detailed delivery and the final decision on the Part 1 offer.
Completed by	Steer
Climate action sign off by	
Director sign off by	
Assessment date	08-Apr-26



Detail of proposal

Context / Background	OCC has commissioned an EqIA and CIA to support the Cabinet decision on the Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan. The assessments cover both the recommended schemes and the alternative options within the investment plan, and consider both individual and cumulative impacts. The plan is structured in two parts, with Part 1 focused on the Park and Ride offer and Part 2 covering supporting measures, including staff travel support, hospital access, active travel and access to employment.
Proposal	The Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan would use surplus congestion charge income to fund a package of transport interventions intended to reduce car trips into Oxford and support lower-carbon travel. Part 1 remains subject to Cabinet decision and relates to the Park and Ride fare offer. The recommended option is a free Park and Ride return bus offer, although alternative Park and Ride pricing options are also under consideration. The package includes four main types of intervention. Fare-based and access measures include the proposed free Park and Ride return bus offer, free weekday Park and Ride parking for NHS and school staff, free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff, and free bus travel for Connect to Work participants. Service provision and network enhancements comprise the proposed hospital express Park and Ride services. Active travel and enabling infrastructure would fund small-scale measures such as cycle parking and minor infrastructure upgrades. A reserve is also included to manage income risk and provide flexibility to extend or rescope measures if required.
Evidence / Intelligence	The assessment is informed by discussion with Oxfordshire County Council officers during development of the Oxford Congestion Charge Investment Plan, including consideration of the different package options and the measures considered most appropriate for inclusion. This has included review of the proposed Park and Ride offer, targeted staff travel support, hospital express Park and Ride services, active travel infrastructure, free bus travel for Connect to Work participants, and the alternative Part 1 options and reinvestment approach set out in the plan. At this stage, the climate assessment is therefore based primarily on the design and intended purpose of the proposed measures, and on officer input regarding how the package has been developed and refined. The assessment remains qualitative and proportionate to the current stage of development, recognising that some delivery details remain to be confirmed and that further scheme-specific assessment may be required as the programme progresses.
Alternatives considered / rejected	The principal alternatives considered relate to Part 1 of the investment plan, where four alternatives to the recommended free Park and Ride return bus offer have been identified. These options would generate different levels of savings, which could be reinvested in active travel, public transport infrastructure and additional fare discounts. A do-nothing approach would mean that surplus congestion charge income is not used to strengthen sustainable travel alternatives and would therefore not support the purpose of the investment plan.

Category	Impact criteria	Score (-3 to +3)	Description of impact	Actions or mitigations to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timeline and monitoring arrangements
Energy	Increases energy efficiency	1	Overall, the investment plan is expected to have a modest positive effect on transport energy efficiency, primarily through reducing private car kilometres and supporting more efficient shared and active travel choices. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): The investment plan includes £500k for active travel infrastructure, such as cycle parking and minor upgrades. These measures may improve the efficiency of short and local trips by enabling some journeys, or parts of journeys, to be made by walking and cycling rather than by private car. This may be particularly relevant for first and last mile access to bus corridors and Park and Ride sites. Fare-based measures (Medium): The free Park and Ride return bus offer, free weekday bus travel for NHS	Maximise uptake of the free Park and Ride return bus offer, staff bus travel offers and active travel improvements through targeted communication and wayfinding. Where uptake is lower than anticipated, review barriers such as interchange quality, cycle parking provision and scheme visibility. Reflect energy-efficiency considerations in the detailed design of active travel works and in any future reallocation of Annex 3 savings.	OCC programme lead, active travel delivery team, public transport team and bus operators.	At scheme mobilisation and during delivery. Monitor uptake of Park and Ride, staff travel offers and active travel measures through routine patronage data, delivery tracking and periodic review as the programme progresses.
Energy	Promotes a switch to low-carbon or renewable energy	1	Overall, the investment plan is expected to support a shift towards lower-carbon transport, although it does so through travel behaviour and service choices rather than through direct energy interventions. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (High): Active travel measures support zero tailpipe emission travel through walking and cycling and may also support greater use of lower-carbon micromobility where available. Practical measures such as cycle parking and minor route improvements may make these alternatives more attractive for journeys that might otherwise be undertaken by car. Fare-based measures (Medium): The fare-led measures within the investment plan may support a shift towards lower-carbon transport by	Prioritise communications and supporting measures that encourage mode shift to lower-carbon travel, including clear promotion of the Park and Ride offer, staff bus travel measures and active travel improvements. If Annex 3 options are pursued, direct any savings towards additional bus fare discounts and active travel measures to retain a strong low-carbon outcome.	OCC programme lead, public transport team, active travel team and bus operators.	At programme launch and at future decision points on Annex 3 options. Monitor patronage, take-up of discounted products and the extent to which scheme changes appear to support lower-car travel over time.
Energy	Promotes resilient, local, smart energy systems	N/A				

			Overall, the investment plan is expected to reduce reliance on private car use for a range of trip purposes and may reduce the perceived need for car ownership for some users.			
Transport & Connectivity	Reduces need to travel and/or the need for private car ownership	3	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Active travel improvements may reduce dependence on the car for local journeys by making short trips more feasible without driving. The proposed cycle parking and minor upgrades may also strengthen access to Park and Ride and bus services, reducing the need to use a car for the whole journey. Fare-based measures (High): The strongest pathway is through fare and access incentives. The free Park and Ride return bus offer is explicitly intended to reduce car trips into Oxford. Free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff, together with Overall, the investment plan is expected to support active travel directly through infrastructure funding and indirectly through measures that improve access and reduce dependency on private cars.	Retain a strong package of non-car incentives, including the free Park and Ride return bus offer or, if an Annex 3 option is chosen, reinvest savings in bus discounts and active travel. Ensure the hospital express Park and Ride services and staff travel measures are designed around real user needs so that non-car options remain credible alternatives to driving.	OCC programme lead, public transport team, active travel team, NHS and school partners, and bus operators.	Before implementation and during operation. Monitor take-up of bus offers, Park and Ride demand, service performance and feedback from key user groups to understand whether the package is reducing reliance on private cars.
Transport & Connectivity	Supports Active Travel	3	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (High): This is the most direct positive pathway within the investment plan. The £500k allocation for active travel infrastructure is intended for small-scale, deliverable measures such as cycle parking and minor upgrades. These measures may improve safety, convenience and accessibility for walking and cycling and may support first and last mile access to Park and Ride and bus services. Fare-based measures (Medium): Fare measures may support active travel indirectly where they encourage more multimodal journeys. For Overall, the investment plan is expected to increase the attractiveness and use of public transport, particularly for Park and Ride, commuting and access to key destinations.	Use the active travel allocation to prioritise small-scale measures that remove practical barriers to walking and cycling, especially around Park and Ride and bus access. Where Annex 3 savings are available, consider directing the additional active travel allocation towards locations that strengthen first and last mile access and support inclusive design.	OCC active travel delivery team and programme lead.	At scheme design, delivery and post-implementation review. Monitor delivery of infrastructure, observe use where feasible, and review whether the measures are supporting safer and more attractive access to hubs and destinations.
Transport & Connectivity	Increases use of public transport	3	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Active travel measures may increase the catchment of public transport by improving access to bus stops and Park and Ride sites without requiring car parking. Cycle parking and other small upgrades may be particularly valuable where access to a hub is currently difficult without driving. Fare-based measures (High): Free Park and Ride return bus offer, free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff, and free bus travel for Connect to Work participants all reduce cost barriers to bus use. Annex 3 also identifies possible reinvestment Overall, the investment plan is expected to support transport electrification indirectly by strengthening demand for lower-emission public transport and supporting lower-emission access modes.	Maintain clear communications on eligibility and use of the free Park and Ride return bus offer, NHS and school staff bus travel and Connect to Work support. Ensure the hospital express Park and Ride services are designed to be reliable and legible. If Annex 3 options are selected, use reinvestment in season ticket discounts, under-19 discounts, group tickets or disability concessions to sustain public transport attractiveness.	OCC public transport team, programme lead, bus operators and relevant delivery partners.	At launch and through the delivery period. Monitor patronage, Park and Ride demand, use of discounted products and service reliability, and review whether public transport use is increasing among intended user groups.
Transport & Connectivity	Accelerates electrification of transport	1	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Active travel infrastructure may support greater use of e-bikes and other low-emission micromobility where available. Although the plan does not directly fund electrification assets, facilities such as cycle parking may help normalise electrified short-distance travel. Fare-based measures (Medium): Fare incentives may increase demand for zero-emission bus services by making bus travel more attractive relative to private cars. The most relevant examples are the free Park	Where service contracts, fleet decisions or supporting works are developed, continue to favour lower-emission fleet deployment and infrastructure where feasible. If future allocations support public transport infrastructure, consider whether those investments can enable lower-emission operations. Keep under review whether additional supporting measures are required to maintain a positive electrification effect.	OCC programme lead, public transport team and bus operators.	At service planning and future funding decisions. Monitor fleet composition where relevant, together with patronage on services expected to support lower-emission travel.
Buildings	Promotes net zero new builds and developments	N/A				
Buildings	Accelerates retrofitting of existing buildings	N/A				

Nature	Protects, restores or enhances biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems		1	Overall, the investment plan is expected to have an indirect positive effect on biodiversity and environmental quality through reductions in traffic-related pressures, although it does not include direct ecological enhancement measures. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Active travel measures may contribute indirectly to a less traffic-dominated street environment where they support mode shift away from private car use. Lower traffic levels may reduce noise and air pollution in some locations, which may benefit urban environmental quality relevant to biodiversity.	Where active travel or public transport works are taken forward, identify opportunities to minimise adverse construction effects and, where proportionate, incorporate environmental enhancements. Monitor whether traffic or environmental pressures are displaced to other locations and consider local mitigation if this emerges as a material issue.	OCC programme lead, active travel delivery team and relevant scheme designers.	At scheme design and through delivery. Monitor implementation, local environmental feedback and any available traffic or air quality information relevant to areas affected by the measures.
Nature	Develops blue and green infrastructure	N/A		Fare-based measures (Medium): The free Park and Ride return bus offer and staff-focused free bus travel are intended to reduce car trips into Oxford. To the extent that these Overall, the investment plan may improve access to green spaces by making non-car journeys easier and more affordable, although the scale of effect will depend on detailed connectivity and uptake.			
Nature	Improves access to nature and green spaces		1	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Small-scale walking and cycling improvements may make local parks and green spaces easier to reach without using a car, especially for short leisure trips and local recreational travel. Fare-based measures (Medium): Lower-cost bus travel and discounted micromobility may reduce affordability barriers to discretionary trips, including access to parks and open spaces. This may be particularly relevant where Annex 3 savings are redirected to additional bus fare discounts such as group tickets or	Where active travel and bus measures are designed in more detail, consider whether they can improve access to parks and open spaces as part of wider accessibility benefits. If Annex 3 savings are reinvested in discounted group or under-19 travel, review whether those products also support affordable leisure access.	OCC programme lead, active travel team and public transport team.	At detailed design and service planning stages. Monitor uptake and user feedback where measures are likely to influence access to local destinations.
Waste & Consumption	Reduces overall consumption		1	Overall, the investment plan is expected to reduce transport fuel consumption where it supports mode shift away from private car use, although wider material consumption effects are limited. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Where active travel improvements replace short car trips, they may reduce fuel consumption directly and support lower resource use per trip. Fare-based measures (Medium): Measures such as the free Park and Ride return bus offer and free bus travel for targeted groups may reduce fuel consumption by shifting travel from private cars to shared public transport. This is likely to be most pronounced where the measure reduces inbound car travel into Oxford.	Maximise the extent of mode shift by maintaining a strong package of fare incentives and deliverable active travel measures. Review whether service performance or infrastructure gaps are limiting the programme's ability to reduce private car kilometres and associated fuel consumption.	OCC programme lead, active travel team, public transport team and bus operators.	During delivery and review stages. Monitor patronage, Park and Ride use and implementation of active travel measures as proxy indicators of reduced car-based fuel consumption.
Waste & Consumption	Supports waste prevention and drive reuse and recycling	N/A					
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to flooding	N/A		Overall, the investment plan may provide a small positive contribution through transport flexibility and long-term mitigation, but direct adaptation effects are limited at plan level.			
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to other extreme weather events (e.g., storms, cold snaps, heatwaves, droughts)		1	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Active travel measures may increase local transport redundancy by providing an alternative to car-based access for short trips during some forms of disruption. Benefits are likely to vary depending on route quality, maintenance and the nature of the weather event. Fare-based measures (Low): Fare measures may support longer-term mitigation through lower car use and emissions, but they do not directly improve adaptation to extreme weather. Their contribution is therefore secondary and diffuse.	Where active travel measures and service changes are developed, ensure they are designed and operated in a way that remains usable during typical weather disruption, including maintenance and operational planning where relevant. Keep under review whether the programme is creating practical alternatives to car use during disruption.	OCC programme lead, active travel team, public transport team and operators.	At scheme design and operational review. Monitor service reliability, user feedback and any issues arising during disruption events.

Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience of council Service Provision and Network Enhancements Provision and Network Enhancements, communities, energy systems, transport infrastructure and/or supply chains		1	Overall, the investment plan may provide a moderate positive contribution to transport and community resilience by reducing pressure on the road network and improving alternatives to private car travel. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Active travel improvements may support local accessibility when car travel is constrained and may provide some network redundancy for short trips. This may be relevant to community resilience and access to local services. Fare-based measures (Medium): Fare-led mode shift may reduce pressure on the road network and support more reliable access to services. Examples include the free Park and Ride return bus offer and staff-focused free bus travel, which	Use the programme to strengthen alternatives to private car access for key journeys, particularly through the hospital express Park and Ride services and staff-focused travel support. Review whether any communities or key destinations remain poorly served and whether targeted adjustments are needed.	OCC programme lead, public transport team, active travel team, NHS and school partners, and bus operators.	During mobilisation and periodic review. Monitor uptake, service performance and feedback from key destinations and user groups to understand whether resilience benefits are being realised.
Procurement & Investment	Procurement practices prioritise low-carbon options, circular economy and sustainability	N/A					
Procurement & Investment	Investment being considered supports climate action/ is consistent with path to net zero		2	Overall, the investment plan is expected to align positively with climate action and the path to net zero as it prioritises lower-car, lower-carbon travel choices and supporting infrastructure. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (High): The dedicated active travel infrastructure budget is directly aligned with climate action because it supports zero tailpipe emission travel and may reduce short car trips. Fare-based measures (High): The fare package is clearly framed around mode shift and reduced car travel. Key examples are the free Park and Ride return bus offer, free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff, and free travel for Connect to Work participants. Annex 3 also shows that, if savings are generated, officers propose	Maintain the package focus on lower-car, lower-carbon travel. If changes are made to the Part 1 offer, use the Annex 3 reinvestment principles to preserve climate benefits through active travel, public transport infrastructure and additional fare discounts. Revisit the CIA as the programme evolves to ensure consistency with climate objectives.	OCC programme lead with input from the Climate Action team where appropriate.	At each major programme decision point and as individual schemes are refined. Monitor delivery against the agreed package and update the assessment if scope changes materially.
People & Organizations	Drives behavioural change to address the climate and ecological emergency		2	Overall, the investment plan is expected to support behaviour change through a combination of cost, convenience and access measures, with the strongest effects likely where incentives are most visible to users. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Improved active travel conditions may support behaviour change by making walking and cycling more practical for everyday journeys and for access to public transport. Fare-based measures (High): Lower fares are one of the main ways this package could encourage people to use public transport instead of driving. Free return bus travel from Park and Ride sites, free weekday bus travel for NHS and school staff, and free travel for Connect to Work participants all make bus travel cheaper for the people using those	Develop a clear communication and engagement approach so that intended users understand the travel offers, eligibility and alternatives to private car use. Tailor messaging for key groups, including staff cohorts and Connect to Work participants, and review whether additional support is required where behaviour change is weaker than expected.	OCC programme lead, communications team, partner employers and bus operators.	Before launch and during implementation. Monitor product take-up, service usage and stakeholder feedback to assess whether behaviour change is occurring as intended.
People & Organizations	Drives organizational and systemic change to address the climate and ecological emergency		1	Overall, the investment plan may support some organisational change, particularly in relation to staff travel, but wider systemic impacts are likely to remain modest without complementary policy measures. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Low): Active travel measures may support workplace travel planning and commuting choices, but on their own they are unlikely to drive organisational or systemic change. Fare-based measures (Medium): The targeted staff-focused measures may support employer-led change by making sustainable commuting more credible for NHS and school staff. Free weekday bus travel and free weekday Park and Ride parking for those groups may help organisations encourage lower-car travel patterns, although the plan does not require	Work with NHS bodies, schools and other partners to integrate the staff travel measures into wider travel planning and internal communications. Encourage partner organisations to promote sustainable travel choices so that the programme contributes to longer-term organisational change.	OCC programme lead with NHS, school and other partner organisations.	At implementation and through ongoing partnership engagement. Monitor participation by partner organisations and review whether the measures are influencing staff travel behaviour.

			Overall, the investment plan may support some green jobs and service innovation, although these effects are likely to be moderate and indirect at programme level.			
Just transition	Promotes green innovation and job creation	1	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): Delivery of active travel measures may support jobs in design, construction, installation and maintenance. Although the works are relatively small scale, they may still support local supply chains. Fare-based measures (Low): Fare measures are less likely to generate direct new employment, although they may support service demand and revenue. Service provision and network enhancements (Medium): Additional service provision, particularly the hospital express Park	Where feasible, use the programme to support innovative but practical delivery models, such as new service approaches or integration between active travel and Park and Ride access. Keep expectations proportionate and ensure any innovation remains focused on deliverability and value for money.	OCC programme lead, public transport team, active travel team and delivery partners.	During detailed scheme development and implementation. Monitor delivery activity and any evident operational or supply-chain benefits associated with the programme.
Just transition	Promotes health and wellbeing	3	Overall, the investment plan is expected to support health and wellbeing through a combination of active travel, improved access and reduced exposure to traffic-related harms. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (High): Active travel measures may increase walking and cycling and therefore physical activity, with associated wellbeing benefits. Small-scale improvements such as cycle parking and safer local links may be particularly relevant where they help people incorporate active travel into routine journeys. Fare-based measures (Medium): Fare incentives may support health and wellbeing indirectly by reducing car dependency and improving access to work, services and opportunities. Measures such as free bus travel for	Design and target the measures so that they improve safe access to work, healthcare and everyday destinations, while also supporting active travel where feasible. For any emerging adverse effects, such as localised traffic pressures, consider whether targeted mitigation or adjustment is required as the programme progresses.	OCC programme lead, active travel team, public transport team, NHS partners and bus operators.	During implementation and review. Monitor uptake, feedback from users and any available information on access, traffic conditions and scheme performance relevant to health and wellbeing outcomes.
Just transition	Reduces poverty and inequality	1	Overall, the investment plan may make a modest positive contribution to reducing poverty and inequality by lowering some transport cost barriers and improving access to employment, services and key destinations, although the scale of impact is likely to vary between groups and is better understood alongside the EqIA. Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Low): The active travel allocation is relatively small and focused on deliverable measures such as cycle parking and minor infrastructure upgrades. On its own, this is unlikely to have a major distributional effect. However, where these measures improve safe and convenient access for local trips or first and last mile connections, they may help reduce the cost of travel for people who are able to walk or cycle rather than rely on paid-for motorised travel. Overall, the investment plan is expected to make a positive contribution to inclusion and participation by improving affordability, widening non-car access to key destinations, and supporting more people to travel for work, education, healthcare and other activities without relying on a private car.	Target the affordability elements of the package towards groups most likely to benefit. This includes maintaining free bus travel for Connect to Work participants, staff travel support, and, where Annex 3 savings arise, considering under-19 discounts, discounted group tickets and extended disability concession access. Use the EqIA and ongoing engagement to identify whether additional mitigation is needed for groups facing residual affordability barriers.	OCC programme lead, public transport team, partner employers and relevant stakeholder groups.	At implementation and review of future funding choices. Monitor take-up of discounted products by intended cohorts, gather stakeholder feedback and revisit the EqIA and CIA as the programme develops.
Just transition	Promotes inclusion and participation	2	Active travel and enabling infrastructure (Medium): The active travel allocation may support inclusion by improving the practical usability of local walking and cycling routes and by making first and last mile access to bus stops and Park and Ride sites easier. Measures such as cycle parking and minor upgrades are unlikely to transform access on their own, but they may improve participation for users who are already close to key destinations or who need better connections to public	Ensure that measures are easy to understand and practically accessible, with clear eligibility criteria and accessible communications. Use the hospital express Park and Ride services, staff offers and Connect to Work support to strengthen access to healthcare, employment and training. If Annex 3 savings are available, consider whether group, youth or disability-focused discounts can widen inclusion further.	OCC programme lead, communications team, public transport team, delivery partners and bus operators.	Before launch and during delivery. Monitor take-up, user feedback and any evidence that specific groups are not benefiting as intended, and refine the package where appropriate.

CABINET
21 APRIL 2026

Devolution Update: Thames Valley Strategic Authority

Report by the Chief Executive

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

1. Note progress on devolution discussions across the Thames Valley between December 2025 and March 2026.
2. Note the evolving national policy context and the emerging position on governance and the supplementary expression of interest (EOI) submitted on 20 March 2026.
3. Agree the proposed next steps to continue constructive engagement with partner authorities and Government, while maintaining the Council's commitment to securing a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) for the Thames Valley.

Executive Summary

4. This report provides a focused update on devolution discussions across the Thames Valley since the Cabinet considered this matter in December 2025. At that meeting, Cabinet confirmed its strong strategic preference for a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) as the model best able to secure significant powers, long-term funding, and national influence for the region.

5. Since December, Government policy has evolved. National messaging has clarified that, for areas not yet within the Devolution Priority Programme, the expected route to an MSA is now via the establishment of a Foundation Strategic Authority (FSA) as an initial stage. In response, Thames Valley partners have pursued a pragmatic approach: continuing to advocate for an eventual MSA, while exploring the scope and potential role of an FSA should Government require an interim foundation phase. As a result a further expression of interest was submitted on 20 March 2026 (Annex 2A) for an FSA.

6. The Councils now await the Minister's response to the Thames Valley's expressions of interest and further clarity on the pathway, pace and criteria for progression from an FSA to an MSA.

Background and Context: Key Developments Since December 2025

In December 2025, Cabinet agreed that Oxfordshire County Council should continue to work with partners to pursue devolution for the Thames Valley and that a Mayoral Strategic Authority represented the preferred and intended governance model, given its ability to provide clear accountability, stronger leadership, and access to the fullest range of devolved powers and funding.

Since that decision, three developments have materially shaped the direction of discussions:

1. Clarification of national policy – The Ministerial Statement in December 2025 **https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2025-12-04/hcws1128** and correspondence from the Minister on 12 February (Annex 1) have made clearer that areas outside the Devolution Priority Programme are expected to build capability and partnership through an initial FSA before accessing mayoral arrangements.
2. Linkage to strategic planning and growth – Ministerial correspondence (Annex 1) explicitly linked strategic planning responsibilities (including Spatial Development Strategy geography) with invitations to come forward as an FSA, reinforcing the role of FSAs in preparing areas for deeper devolution. Councils were encouraged to consider the Spatial Development Strategy geography as a sensible geography for any future FSA.
3. Increased emphasis on readiness and deliverability – Engagement with Ministers and officials has highlighted Government's focus on strong foundations, demonstrable joint working, and credible governance as prerequisites for progression to an MSA.

These changes represent a shift in sequencing rather than ambition. Thames Valley Leaders and officers have consistently reaffirmed that an MSA remains the intended end-state, while recognising the need to respond constructively to the national framework now being applied by Government.

On 20 March 2026 the Leaders agreed to submit an expression of interest (EOI) in response to the Ministers letter of 12 February to proceed with an FSA. This EOI was supplementary to the earlier EOI submitted by the Thames Valley Leaders in December 2025 (Annex 2B).

Progress December 2025 – March 2026

Engagement with Government

Informal engagement has continued with Ministers and officials to understand expectations on governance, geography and timing. Government has reiterated that mayoral governance remains its preferred model, while signalling that an FSA is now the expected entry point where partnership maturity and delivery track record need to be strengthened.

In discussions with Ministers on 10 March 2026, Leaders were clear that the Thames Valley remains ambitious for an MSA and that any FSA would be pursued explicitly as a step towards that goal.

Partnership Working Across the Thames Valley

Leaders across the Thames Valley have continued to explore options for a strategic authority that reflects functional economic geography while respecting local political realities.

Work has focused on identifying areas of clear strategic common ground and on understanding differential readiness across the geography. While variation of opinion regarding an FSA exists, there has been continued commitment to constructive dialogue and maintaining momentum.

Strategic Case for Devolution

Further evidence has been developed on the economic, housing, transport and skills case for devolution at Thames Valley scale (Annex 2C)

This work continues to underline the strategic importance of the Thames Valley to national growth and the value of devolved decision-making to unlock infrastructure and productivity.

Strategic Authority Models: An FSA as the foundation for an MSA

As a first-wave FSA, the Thames Valley would be well-placed to act as a pioneer for this model, shaping how FSAs operate in practice and demonstrating how they can accelerate progress towards an MSA.

An FSA would enable the Thames Valley to:

- Establish a formal strategic authority covering agreed functional economic geography.
- Carry out defined strategic functions, including:
    - Strategic planning and preparation of a Spatial Development Strategy;
    - Strategic transport coordination and prioritisation under a Local transport Plan;
    - Economic development, productivity and inward investment under a Local growth Plan;
    - Skills coordination and engagement with national programmes with specific responsibility for adults skills;
    - Supporting housing delivery at scale through strategic alignment and the potential to work with Homes England in a strategic partnership.

- Strengthen joint working, shared capacity and collective decision-making.
- Build a demonstrable track record of delivery and partnership in advance of mayoral governance.

A table of the FSA functions is included at Annex 3.

Importantly, any move towards an FSA would be pursued on the explicit basis that it is a stepping stone to an MSA, not an alternative end-state. This approach is consistent with the position agreed by Cabinet in December 2025 and reflects a pragmatic response to the Government's current policy framework.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

Progress on devolution continues to support the Council's objectives for inclusive growth, infrastructure delivery and increased local influence over strategic decisions affecting residents and businesses.

Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this update report. Any future devolution agreement would be accompanied by a full assessment of financial implications.

Comments checked by: Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial Services, ian.dyson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this update. Any formal devolution arrangements would be subject to detailed legal advice and approval.

Comments checked by: Jay Akbar, Head of Legal & Governance, jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

There are no immediate staff implications. Further programme capacity requirements will be considered as proposals develop.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

No specific equality or inclusion impacts arise at this stage. These considerations will be integral to the development of any future proposals.

Sustainability Implications

Devolution offers opportunities to strengthen strategic action on transport, climate and sustainable growth, which will be developed further as proposals mature.

Risk Management

Key risks remain:

- Continued alignment across partner authorities where forthcoming elections could impact the political landscape of the Thames Valley;
- Uncertainty over Government timing and progression criteria as the FSA would be established under the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill which has not yet received Royal Assent
- Opportunity costs if the area is unable to move at pace.

These risks are being managed through continued engagement, evidence-building and dialogue with Government.

Consultations

Engagement to date has focused on partner authorities and informal Government discussions. Formal consultation would follow a favourable Government response to our EOI.

A programme of stakeholder engagement would also be expected to commence in early Summer.

Annex 1: Ministers' letter 12 February 2026
Annex 2A: Supplementary expression of interest
Annex 2B: Existing expression of interest
Annex 2C: Strategic Case for Devolution at Thames Valley Scale
Annex 3: Table of FSA functions

Background papers: Devolution White Paper December 2025

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Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Matthew Pennycook MP
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Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Devolution, Faith and Communities
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All Council Leaders, All Mayors, and All Chief Executives

12 February 2026

Dear Leaders, Mayors, and Chief Executives,

Economic growth is the number one mission of this government. We know that growth is best achieved when local leaders are empowered to think strategically across the right geographies, supported by strong institutions, and when they have the ability to plan for the long term. This belief has underpinned our ambitious programme of deepening and extending devolution. It has also guided many of our changes to the planning system.

We are determined to keep up the pace on these vital reforms. That is why we wrote to you before Christmas about our overhaul of national planning policy, and it is why today we are taking two further steps: publishing a non-statutory consultation on the geographies for Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs), so that we can confirm the areas across which the new system of strategic planning will operate; and inviting expressions of interest from authorities without an existing devolution agreement to be part of a new wave of Foundation Strategic Authorities (FSAs) across England.

Spatial Development Strategies

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 reinstates a strategic planning system for England. Once the provisions in the Act are commenced – which is expected by the summer – places will be required to produce an SDS. These strategies will deal with strategic and cross-boundary issues and set the context for local plans, which will have to be in ‘general conformity’ with the umbrella SDS once adopted. By taking a sub-regional view of how growth needs can be sustainably met, they will help us build more homes, co-ordinate the delivery of strategic infrastructure, grow the economy, and improve the environment and climate resilience.

We strongly believe that strategic planning, as just one part of the growth equation, is most effective when done over devolution geographies. Aligning it with Strategic Authorities’ transport, skills, and economic development powers will help ensure better integrated, more effective delivery. This is why we set out, in the English Devolution White Paper, that Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be empowered to produce SDSs for their regions, and why we are giving Mayors strategic development management powers through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, currently before Parliament. This will enable Mayoral Strategic Authorities to guide planning applications of

potential strategic importance to ensure that the overall strategy and any policies within the SDS are being implemented.

For parts of the country currently without mayoral devolution, we have set out that SDSs need to be developed across ‘sensible geographies’ in line with the principles of the English Devolution White Paper. Today we are launching a consultation on what these sensible geographies might be. In some places, there is already broad agreement on them, and we have indicated these in the consultation. In other places, we do not believe there is a consensus view yet, and so we are seeking proposals from you that align with the ‘sensible geography’ criteria in the White Paper.

Where SDSs are not coterminous with Strategic Authorities, the formal mechanism for areas to work together on their SDS will be a Strategic Planning Board (SPB), which will be established through secondary legislation. We will undertake statutory consultation prior to establishing these boards, alongside more detailed engagement and discussion with relevant authorities. This is expected to take place in the spring for most areas, but there may be an opportunity to move ahead with this more quickly where there is clear agreement, in which case MHCLG officials will be in contact with authorities about the details of an SPB during the consultation period.

A new wave of Foundation Strategic Authorities

Given our belief that sensible strategic planning and devolution geographies will, in the vast majority of cases, be one and the same, the development of SDS footprints is also an opportunity to agree the shape of devolution geographies for areas currently without a Strategic Authority. The government is therefore inviting these places to come forward with expressions of interest for the establishment of new FSAs, which must meet the criteria in the English Devolution White Paper and therefore should, typically, align with SDS geographies. As you would expect, we are also working across government to ensure this approach aligns with other reform programmes affecting public service boundaries, including the current Review of Police Structures.

FSAs will have devolved powers over local transport and skills, as well as being responsible for delivering the area’s SDS where the SDS boundary is coterminous with the FSA. There are then a further set of powers and partnerships available to FSAs – the full FSA offer is set out in Devolution Framework at Section 3.10 of the English Devolution White Paper. The government is also currently consulting on giving FSAs the power to raise an Overnight Visitor Levy, which would be an additional power not currently in the Devolution Framework.

The government remains firmly committed to mayoral devolution and is forging ahead with it – including through our Devolution Priority Programme – but we have been clear that this model works best when built on firm foundations. This includes the strong unitary structures we are creating through local government reorganisation, and we remain fully committed to delivering these important reforms within this Parliament to the timetable set out. Alongside this, we see FSAs – as non-mayoral Combined or Combined County Authorities – to be a valuable way to build local capacity and partnerships, and as a stepping stone towards mayoral devolution in the future. While we recognise the demands that delivering reorganisation places on local authorities, we do not see that as a barrier to conversations about the establishment of FSAs and how to devolve powers to unleash local growth. We want to discuss with local authorities interested in taking this forward how best to manage the two processes effectively.

We would therefore like to invite all areas in England without an existing devolution agreement to come forward with their neighbours to take on devolution through an FSA over a sensible geography. We welcome expressions of interest over the coming weeks and we will begin reviewing responses from 20 March.

This will help sustain momentum on this exciting next stage of empowering local government and ensure the government delivers the benefits of devolution to all parts of England as soon as we can. It is important that all expressions of interest have the support from the relevant authorities and meet the criteria set out in the English Devolution White Paper.

As we said in our letter just before Christmas, it is only through continued close working between all of us that we will deliver the homes, jobs and improved living standards we owe to those we serve. The steps we are taking today will help embed that cooperation not just in this Parliament, but for years to come.

Best Wishes,





MIATTA FAHNBULLEH MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Devolution, Faith and Communities

MATTHEW PENNYCOOK MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning

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Our Reference: TVDEVO 20 March 2026

Dear Ministers,

Expression of Interest for a Thames Valley Strategic Authority

We, the Leaders in Thames Valley, are submitting this Expression of Interest (EOI) in response to your letter of 12 February 2026 and following our meeting with the Minister, Miatta Fahnbulleh, on 10 March 2026.

Further to our previous correspondence and discussions we have a compelling case for a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) and electing a Mayor in 2028. The Minister was clear in our meeting on 10 March 2026 that 'the economic case is made', therefore if an FSA is the only means by which we can achieve that ambition we are ready to progress with an FSA and would like to express our aspirations for an election of a Mayor in May 2028, if that is considered to be achievable. The current mandate from our various Councils is to pursue a Mayoral Strategic Authority and, should the Minister support this EOI which endorses and expands upon our earlier EOI, we would require a further mandate from our Councils to propose the route through an FSA. We would propose to seek that mandate at pace prior to consultation on any formal proposal.

The following sets out how a Thames Valley Strategic Authority aligns fully with the principles and expectations expressed in your letter of 12 February.

The Thames Valley is one of the UK's most economically significant regions with the potential to rank as England's second most productive economy per capita and the

third largest MSA by economic output. However, its potential is currently constrained by fragmented labour markets, infrastructure deficits, and the absence of a unified strategic authority. The Thames Valley is the only region among the UK's top ten economies not served by a directly elected mayor, creating a gap in representation and strategic oversight that could hinder our competitiveness, productivity and ability to deliver inclusive growth as identified in **Annex 1**.

The Thames Valley faces major constraints to growth that we believe can only be unlocked by a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). Priority growth areas such as the Oxfordshire to Cambridge corridor continue to face significant imbalances in investment, infrastructure, and governance. While neighbouring regions benefit from coordinated leadership and targeted support, the Thames Valley risks being left behind in terms of economic development and regional planning. This, in turn, would impact the Government's own plan for growth.

Expression of Interest

Our EOI seeks to formalise a strategic governance model that can unlock the region's full potential, support national missions, and deliver benefits for residents, employers, and the wider UK economy.

The Government's invitation sets out several expectations for FSAs. We summarise each requirement below and show how the Thames Valley proposal meets them.

a) Clear functional economic geography

The Thames Valley already operates as a polycentric but coherent economic region. Despite current fragmentation, our economic data shows:

- A combined population of **1.97 million**.
- A GVA of **£97.3 billion** (2023).
- Nationally significant assets, including world-leading universities, innovation districts (Harwell, Culham, Aldermaston), and global employers along the M4/M40 corridors.

Our EOI directly responds to Government's requirement for FSAs to demonstrate a clear economic footprint and the ability to operate at scale.

b) Partnership and collaboration across local government

Collaboration across the Thames Valley is already strong and mature:

- The **Berkshire Prosperity Board** brings unitary councils together around shared economic priorities.
- The **Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee** provides long-standing strategic leadership across county and district councils.
- Joint programmes such as the **Oxford Growth Commission**, **England's Economic Heartland**, the **Oxford-Cambridge Corridor**, and

cross-boundary transport planning demonstrate our readiness to work collectively.

Formalising this collaboration under a Strategic Authority meets Government expectations for credible and effective partnership structures.

c) Capacity to deliver strategic functions

The region is prepared to take on strategic functions, including:

- Transport and connectivity (Local Transport Plan, rail investment coordination, bus franchising assessment).
- Housing and regeneration (Spatial Development Strategy, accelerated delivery models).
- Skills (integration with LSIPs, alignment with priority growth sectors, stronger links with DWP).
- Economic development (inward investment, innovation acceleration, coordinated regional planning).

These functions align directly with the February letter's expectation that FSAs must focus on the strategic levers that support economic growth and national priorities.

At our meeting with you on 10 March 2026 it was recognised that the FSAs needed to be strengthened beyond the powers and responsibilities that were originally included in the devolution framework set out by Government. We remain committed to securing a Mayoral Strategic Authority at pace, with your agreement, for the Thames Valley to maximise the benefits to the regional economy. This EOI is submitted in good faith that Government will ensure FSAs have the necessary powers, funding and responsibilities to drive the regional economy, creating a springboard for a future MSA investment strategy that attracts significant institutional and cross-sector inward investment, enabling the objectives of a Thames Valley Growth Plan.

d) Alignment to national missions

Our proposal aligns with the Government's mission to kickstart economic growth particularly focused in these areas:

- **Innovation** – leveraging R&D clusters, supporting diffusion of innovation.
- **Skills** – boosting access to high-value employment, tackling economic inactivity.
- **Housing** – addressing affordability constraints that undermine productivity.
- **Net zero and energy resilience** – embedding climate adaptation and sustainability into growth planning.
- **Infrastructure** – unlocking grid, water and transport constraints that currently limit business expansion.

e) Strong case for an effective governance model

The Thames Valley offers a distinctive opportunity for Government:

We are not seeking to generate growth from a low base; we are seeking to unlock constraints in one of the UK's most productive regions. Delivering full economic integration could generate:

- **£18.7 billion** additional GVA annually by 2040.
- **£7 billion** additional annual tax revenue.

This represents one of the strongest potential returns of any proposed Strategic Authority.

Strategic Purpose

To create a joined-up, high-performing regional economy by reducing fragmentation, strengthening collaboration, and enabling transport, housing, skills, and economic policy to operate at the scale of the real functional economic area.

The proposed FSA builds on—and does not replace—the responsibilities of unitary councils. Councils retain control of local service delivery; the Strategic Authority provides the scale, coherence, and convening power needed for:

- Region-wide spatial planning.
- Integrated labour market strategies.
- Long-term infrastructure planning.
- Coordinated transport and skills investment.

Governance and Readiness

We propose establishing the Thames Valley Strategic Authority through a partnership governance model with clear accountability, transparent decision-making and strong local leadership.

The region's established track record of joint working demonstrates both readiness and credibility.

Proposed Strategic Functions

The Strategic Authority would lead or coordinate the following strategic functions:

Transport and Connectivity

- Develop an integrated Local Transport Plan Coordinate strategic rail priorities including East-West Rail, Western Rail Approaches, Southern Access, and Oxford-Reading-Swindon links.
- Explore bus franchising to increase reliability, access, and affordability.
- Enhance digital connectivity across rural and urban areas.

Skills and Employment

- Align Adult Skills Funding and LSIPs with regional labour market needs.
- Work with DWP on joint initiatives to tackle economic inactivity and youth unemployment.
- Strengthen employer-education partnerships.

Housing and Spatial Planning

- Develop a Spatial Development Strategy aligned with regional economic priorities.
- Work with Homes England and the Oxford Growth Commission on delivery vehicles to accelerate housing supply.
- Coordinate infrastructure delivery to unlock major housing sites.

Economic Development and Innovation

- Create a single Local Growth Plan (subject to these powers being included in the FSA model).
- Coordinate inward investment activity.
- Establish a UKRI-backed Innovation Accelerator.
- Support sector-specific clusters including life sciences, defence and security, and advanced manufacturing.

Environment, Net Zero and Climate Resilience

- Deliver a regional climate resilience framework.
- Accelerate nature recovery, flood mitigation, and green infrastructure.

Health, Wellbeing and Public Service Integration

- Work closely with the Integrated Care Board to link economic development with wealth and wellbeing outcomes.

Public safety

- Work with the Thames Valley Police to ensure alignment of policing objectives with the strategic objectives and delivery of the new authority.
- Subject to amendments to the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, provide a singular Fire and Rescue Authority aligned to the boundaries of the new strategic authority.

Distinctiveness of the Thames Valley Proposal

The Thames Valley Strategic Authority differs from existing arrangements in key ways:

- An established high-growth region seeking to remove constraints,
- Multiple complementary hubs rather than a single dominant city.
- Strong innovation assets aligned with national missions.
- It meets all the key priority sectors identified in the industrial strategy.

- A proven ability to deliver growth quickly when barriers are removed.

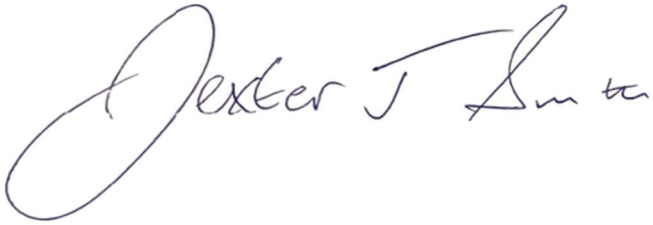
Next Steps
We welcome the opportunity to engage further with Government officials to refine our proposal, including:

- Working through governance options and timetabling to assist the Government's public sector reform agenda.
- Identifying appropriate fiscal tools aligned to the region's growth model.

We stand ready to support, at pace, the Government's ambition for a nationwide network of Strategic Authorities and to demonstrate how the Thames Valley can play a leading role in national economic renewal.

Yours sincerely,





Cllr Liz Leffman
Leader
Oxfordshire County Council

On behalf of the
Oxfordshire Leaders

Cllr Dexter Smith
Leader
Slough Borough Council

On behalf of the
Berkshire Prosperity Board

Dear Secretary of State,

We, the leaders of the local authorities in the Thames Valley, are writing to you in your capacity as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding our desire for devolution and our inclusion on a future Devolution Programme.

We have carefully considered our rationale and case for devolution to this region and see a significant opportunity to drive growth and prosperity as a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Our £97 billion economy is already a core contributor to the national economy and will continue to add economic value through our highly productive and innovative businesses, constituting the sectors prioritised in the Modern Industrial Strategy and a large part of the Ox-Cam Corridor, a key national growth proposition. However, the region's post-pandemic recovery has been slower than the national trajectory, and our globally recognised clusters face increasingly strong competition. We will use the powers, investment and platform as an MSA to unlock constraints on growth, with the potential for the Thames Valley economy to be up to £18.7 billion a year larger by 2040, which corresponds to a £7 billion annual uplift in tax revenue contributions to the exchequer.

We have come together as strong local Leaders to pursue the significant opportunities of devolution for our communities. Whilst we acknowledge and respect our differing political and local priorities, together we recognise and collectively support the core economic rationale and strategic intention for delivering inclusive growth within a Thames Valley MSA. We stand ready with the strength of relationships, trust, track record, collective governance and ways of working required to work with Government and implement a successful MSA. We would like to work towards a first mayoral election in May 2027, in line with the current timeline for local government reorganisation.

Importance of the Thames Valley for the UK Economy

The Thames Valley serves as an innovation-driven and export-focused catalyst for UK economic growth, accounting for approximately 5% of England's total economy while comprising just 3.4% of its population. Our economy comprises world-renowned universities, respected research centres, and leading science parks filled with forward-thinking companies, driving innovation ecosystems that spur new ideas and growth across UK supply chains. Oxford University is a jewel in the UK's global research offer, and our partnerships with Reading University creates value for residents, businesses, and investors through key assets such as the Thames Valley Science Park, which hosts research facilities and archives for the Natural History Museum, British Museum and Kew Gardens. Our region is a globally compelling investment case, with major global companies such as Microsoft, Oracle, Redwood Technologies, Virgin, Vodafone, and Hewlett-Packard located in the UK's Silicon Valley along the M4 corridor, with direct links to London and Heathrow Airport. From the region that gave the world the Oxford–AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, the Ellison Institute of Technology in Oxford is now investing over £10 billion in research and development to facilitate further globally significant advancements in artificial intelligence, robotics, and life

sciences. Major investment in AI infrastructure has been secured across the region, with the second largest concentration of data centres in the world in Slough and the first AI Growth Zone in Culham. We have high-performance manufacturing capabilities along the M40 corridor, exemplified by Plant Oxford, home to BMW Mini, extending into Banbury and the UK Motorsports Valley into the Midlands. We are home to world-famous tourist attractions, from Windsor to the Cotswolds, Oxford, Blenheim Palace and Bicester Village. We are known world-over as a great place to visit, live, innovate and invest. Our investment proposition is already backed by Government, with continued global promotion of the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, of which we are a core part, investment in East-West Rail, high-profile support through the Oxford Growth Commission and recent investment in the Cowley branch line.

The industrial composition of the Thames Valley directly aligns with almost all the sector strengths outlined in the Industrial Strategy – our economy is anchored by professional and business services, with notable capabilities in digital technologies, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and a prominent finance sector. The strength of the region's visitor economy not only supports our foundational sectors but also positively impacts our creative industries, especially our growing film and television cluster around Shinfield Studios. Proposed visitor economy investments, including the Puy du Fou Bicester, together with significant heritage landmarks would remain substantial contributors to export growth. Importantly, the Thames Valley demonstrates a strong orientation towards export activities: approximately 48% of the workforce is employed in exporting industries, and 40% hold positions within tradable sectors, both figures exceeding national averages. Exceptional productivity and economic complexity facilitate the dissemination of innovation across key sectors and strengthen supply chains nationwide. Furthermore, growth in GVA and household income in the Thames Valley has surpassed national rates, thereby improving local living standards and contributing positively to Exchequer revenues.

Signs of risk and stagnation

Despite the Thames Valley's underlying strength, the region has not re-established its pre-pandemic growth path. Post-Covid productivity indicators show mixed fortunes, even as the UK aggregate edged up through 2023, evidence that recovery here has been shallower than the national trend. If the region were to return to the pre-pandemic growth trajectory from 2027 onwards the Thames Valley economy would be up to £18.7bn a year larger by 2040. This matters for residents: a weaker trajectory means fewer high-value job opportunities and slower wage progression than would otherwise have been the case. Slower growth in the Thames Valley reverberates through national supply chains and weakens spillovers to other regions, putting at risk delivery of the Industrial Strategy's IS-8 ambitions on productivity, exports and business investment. It limits the pace at which discoveries are commercialised, dampens the pipeline of high-value FDI into the UK, and slows diffusion of technologies across the wider economy. Crucially, restoring the Thames Valley's growth trajectory would result in an estimated £7 billion increase in tax revenue contributions from residents and

businesses, directly strengthening the Government's ability to fund essential services and invest in long-term national priorities.[1]

Scale and agglomeration to drive growth

To address these risks and realise our full economic potential, we need to leverage our potential for scale and agglomeration across our economic geographies. While each authorities' economy is individually strong, travel-to-work analysis reveals largely self-contained labour markets with currently limited cross-boundary matching and knowledge transfer across the region. In this current fragmentation lies a clear opportunity: given the region's complementary sector strengths the absence of integrated governance and coordinated connectivity means the Thames Valley is under-leveraging innovation adoption and diffusion and the opportunity to create a more unified labour market to scale economic growth.

Establishing an MSA with a growth mission at its core

We propose the establishment of a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) as a decisive step towards realising inclusive growth across our region. By harnessing devolved powers, the MSA will transform thriving yet separate labour markets into a unified innovation economy, ensuring that prosperity is accessible to all communities. Through the implementation of a Local Growth Plan, we can extend and enhance the efforts of the Oxford Growth Commission to systematically address housing quantity, quality, and affordability across the Thames Valley, one of the key constraints on inclusive growth and a key driver of deprivation. MSA powers would enable accelerated delivery of affordable and social homes, around employment hubs. Integrated multi-modal, low carbon transport solutions could be expanded and expedited along the M4/M40 corridors, into Heathrow and across the Ox-Cam corridor, and critical investment in digital, water and energy infrastructure facilitated, strengthening connections between urban and rural residents and key economic growth nodes, and beyond. This infrastructure delivery would align with targeted skills and employment initiatives, developed with spatial awareness of our IS-8 strengths and a commitment to tackling deprivation and untapped potential within our communities. Enhanced collaboration and coordination enabled by the MSA would also position the region to more effectively address environmental priorities, including climate change and biodiversity.

Collectively, these measures would result in improved job opportunities, reduced commute times, and provide greater access to affordable housing for residents, supported by an aligned skills programme and transport system that matches talent to opportunity. For the UK, it means the Thames Valley driving national growth through faster innovation, stronger exports, and a bigger boost to the public purse.

We recognise the highly interconnected nature of the Thames Valley, with London, across the Ox-Cam Corridor and into the Midlands. A Thames Valley MSA will be a strategic

[1] This estimate is based off the ratio of GDP to national taxation (UK taxation as 37% of GDP) established by Institute for Fiscal Studies research

platform from which to go further and faster on pan-regional collaboration with our neighbours, including working on joint projects, spatial development and investment to drive wider economic growth. We are determined to use our Thames Valley partnership to further capitalise on economic scale and complementarity and compete across the globe.

If granted MSA status, the Thames Valley would be a fundamentally different kind of strategic authority – the largest by GVA outside of London, the MSA will be focused on unlocking constraints on an already high-performing economy so that all areas of the Thames Valley, and indeed beyond, benefit. We are therefore actively exploring innovative approaches to securing private investment and financing. Work is already underway to develop robust and viable propositions that match the scale and ambition for a Thames Valley MSA, and we look forward to working with Government to shape this more sustainable growth financing model.

Next steps

A Thames Valley MSA would unlock constrained, high-value growth, accelerate innovation diffusion across IS-8 sectors, and strengthen national fiscal headroom. We therefore ask that the Thames Valley be considered for inclusion in the next Devolution Programme, and we would welcome an early meeting to discuss this opportunity. We are ready to work in open dialogue with MHCLG and your officials to implement a new phase of devolution and make the best impact for our businesses, communities, and the country.

Thames Valley
Mayoral Strategic
Authority

Annex 2c

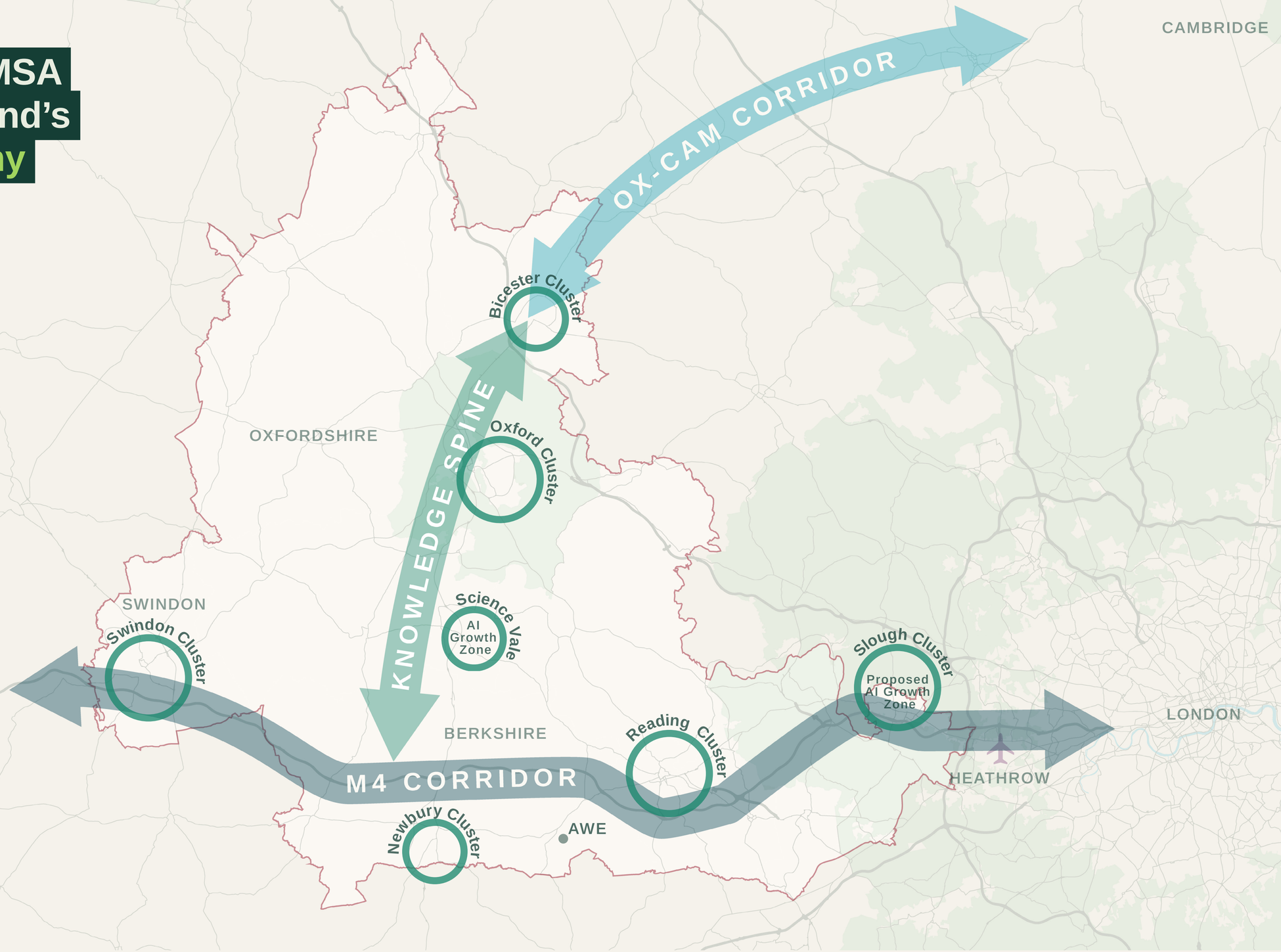
Unlocking a UK economic powerhouse

The case for a Thames Valley Mayor

Tuesday 10 March 2026

The Thames Valley MSA would rank as England's third largest economy





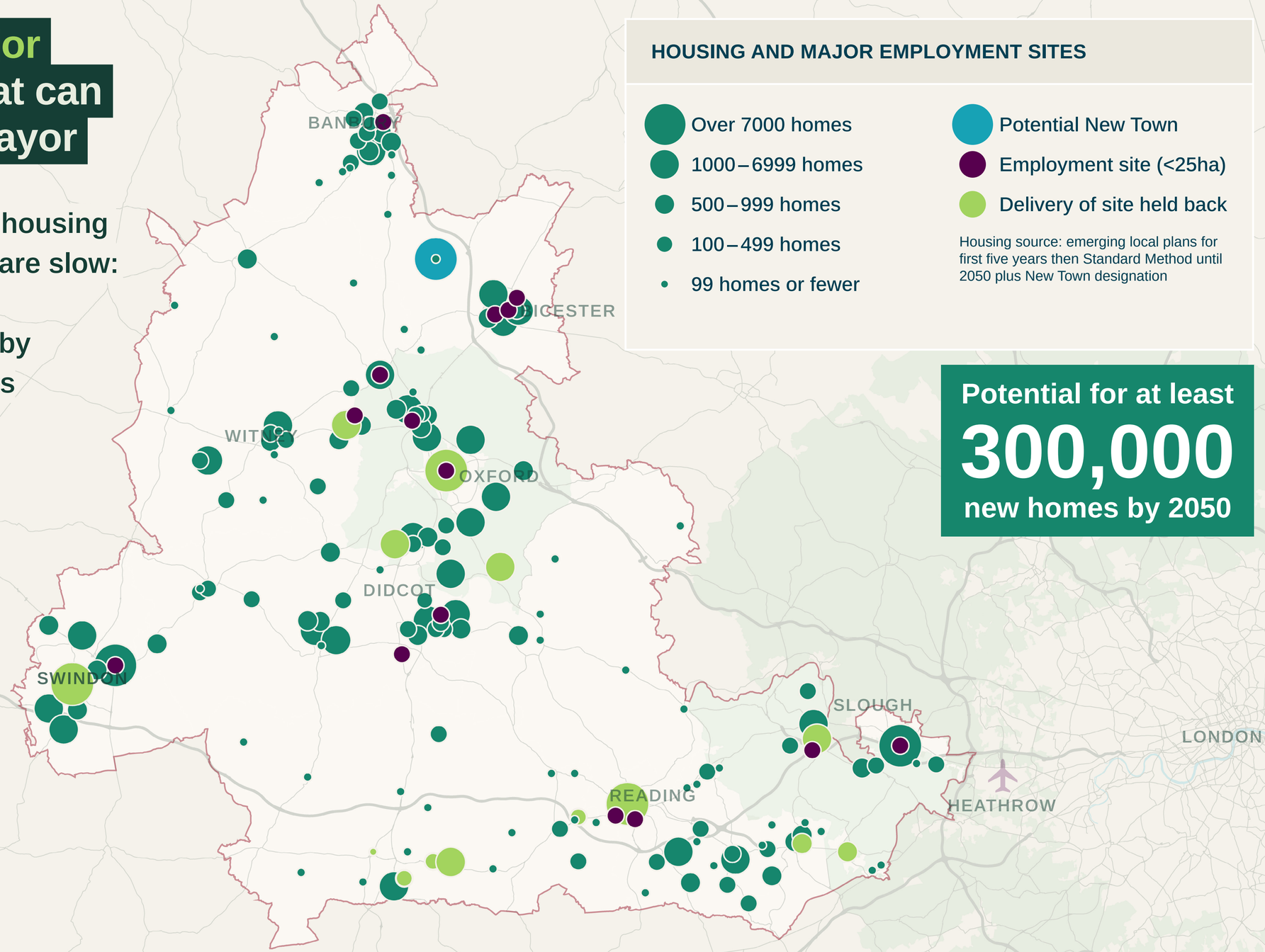
Thames Valley faces major constraints to growth that can only be unlocked by a Mayor

The region has ambitious plans for housing and employment but delivery rates are slow:

Over 47,000 homes are held back by viability or infrastructure challenges

House prices are **£110,000** above national average

Houses are less affordable; 9.5x higher in TV and 11.2x higher in Oxford than residential earnings, compared to an England average of 7.7x



HOUSING AND MAJOR EMPLOYMENT SITES

- Over 7000 homes
- 1000–6999 homes
- 500–999 homes
- 100–499 homes
- 99 homes or fewer
- Potential New Town
- Employment site (<25ha)
- Delivery of site held back

Housing source: emerging local plans for first five years then Standard Method until 2050 plus New Town designation

Potential for at least

300,000

new homes by 2050

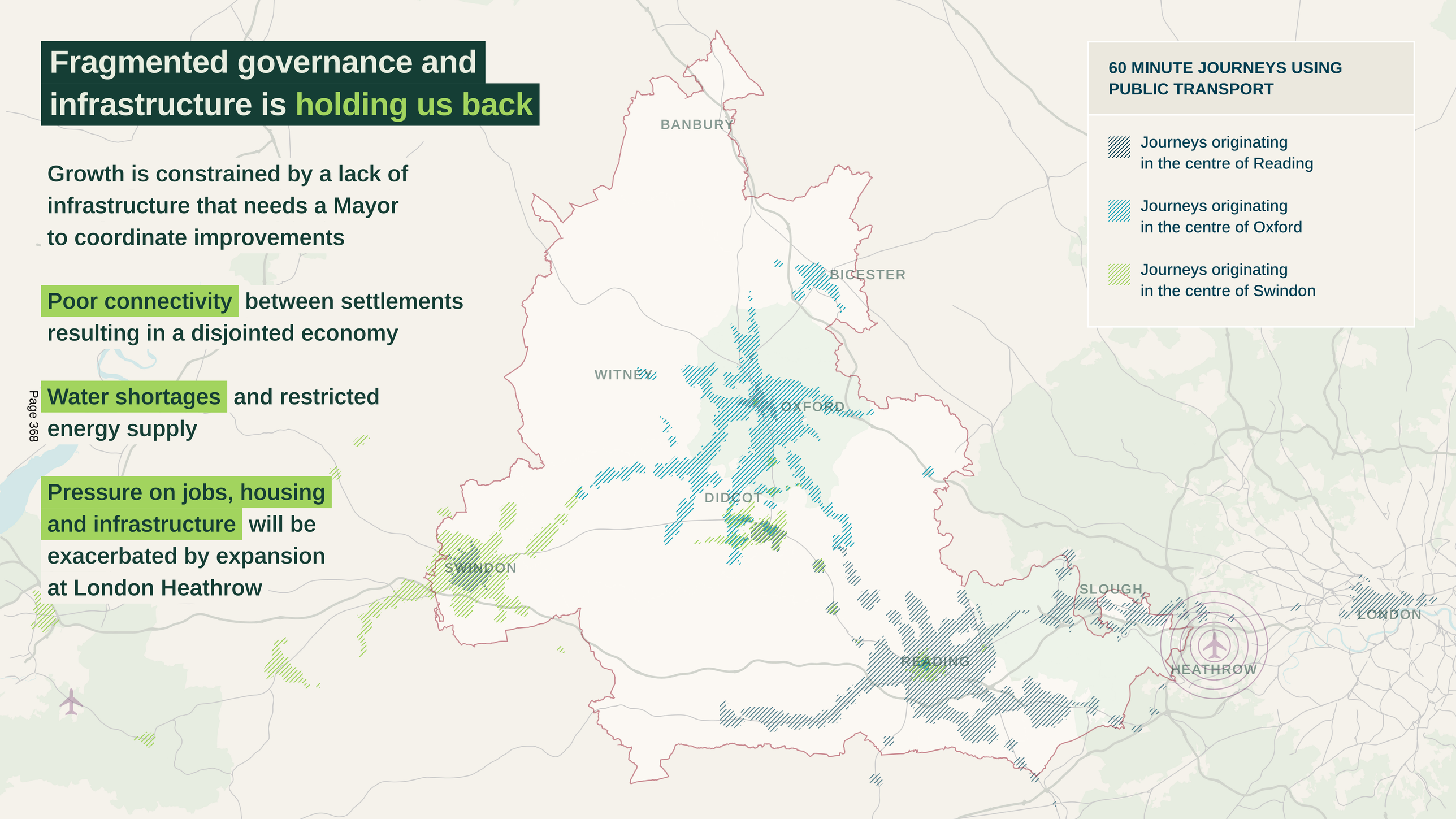
Fragmented governance and infrastructure is holding us back

Growth is constrained by a lack of infrastructure that needs a Mayor to coordinate improvements

Poor connectivity between settlements resulting in a disjointed economy

Water shortages and restricted energy supply

Pressure on jobs, housing and infrastructure will be exacerbated by expansion at London Heathrow



The Mayoral dividend

An MSA brings transformational uplift not possible through an FSA

A singular figurehead

- Drive a vision and build confidence
- Drive inward investment
- Convening power
- Collaboration with other Mayors and regions
- Build investor confidence

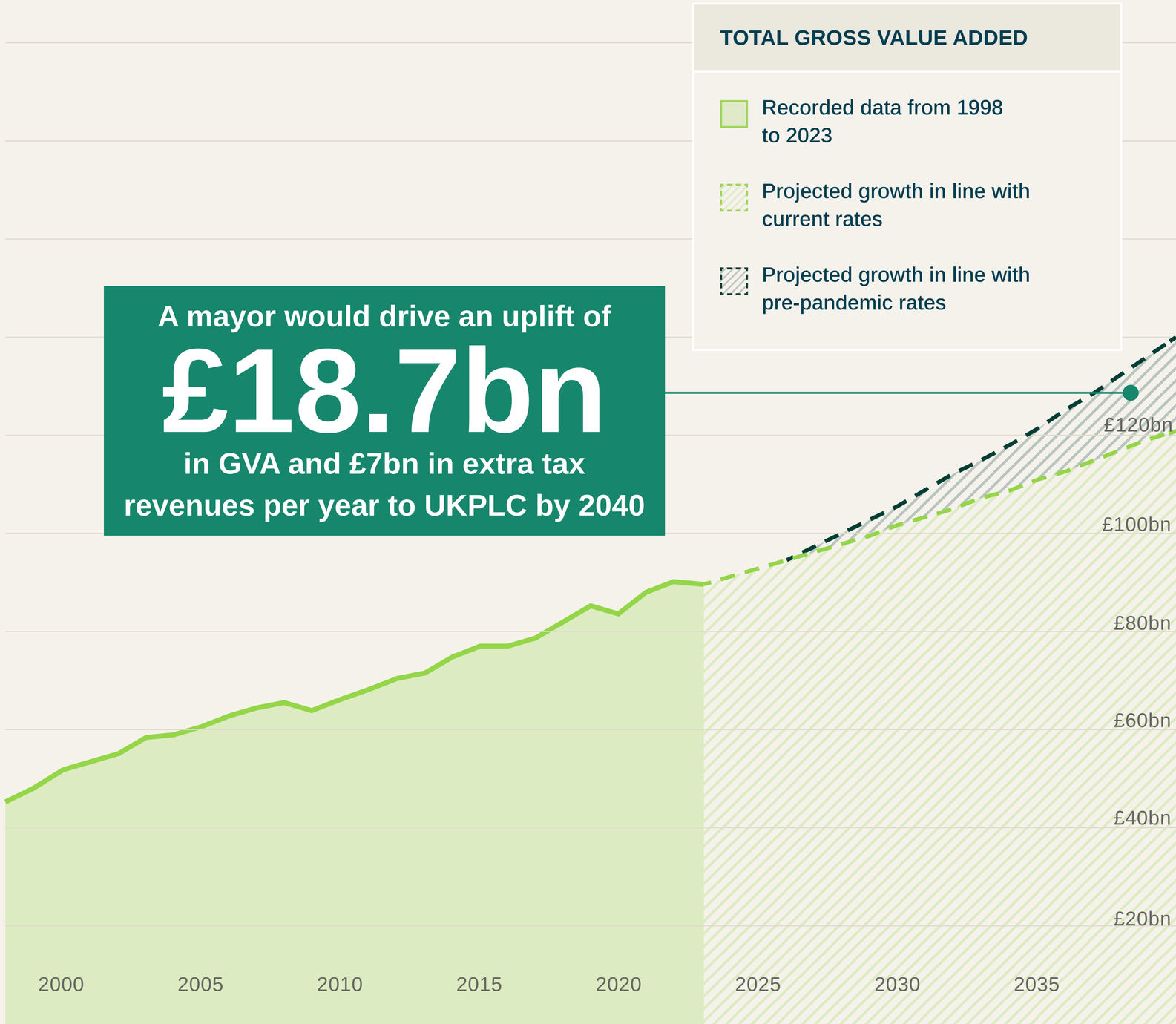
Housing and regeneration

- Consolidating strategic planning powers
- Implement Mayoral Development Corporations
- Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England

A mayor would drive an uplift of

£18.7bn

in GVA and £7bn in extra tax revenues per year to UKPLC by 2040



The Mayoral dividend

An MSA brings transformational uplift not possible through an FSA

Infrastructure

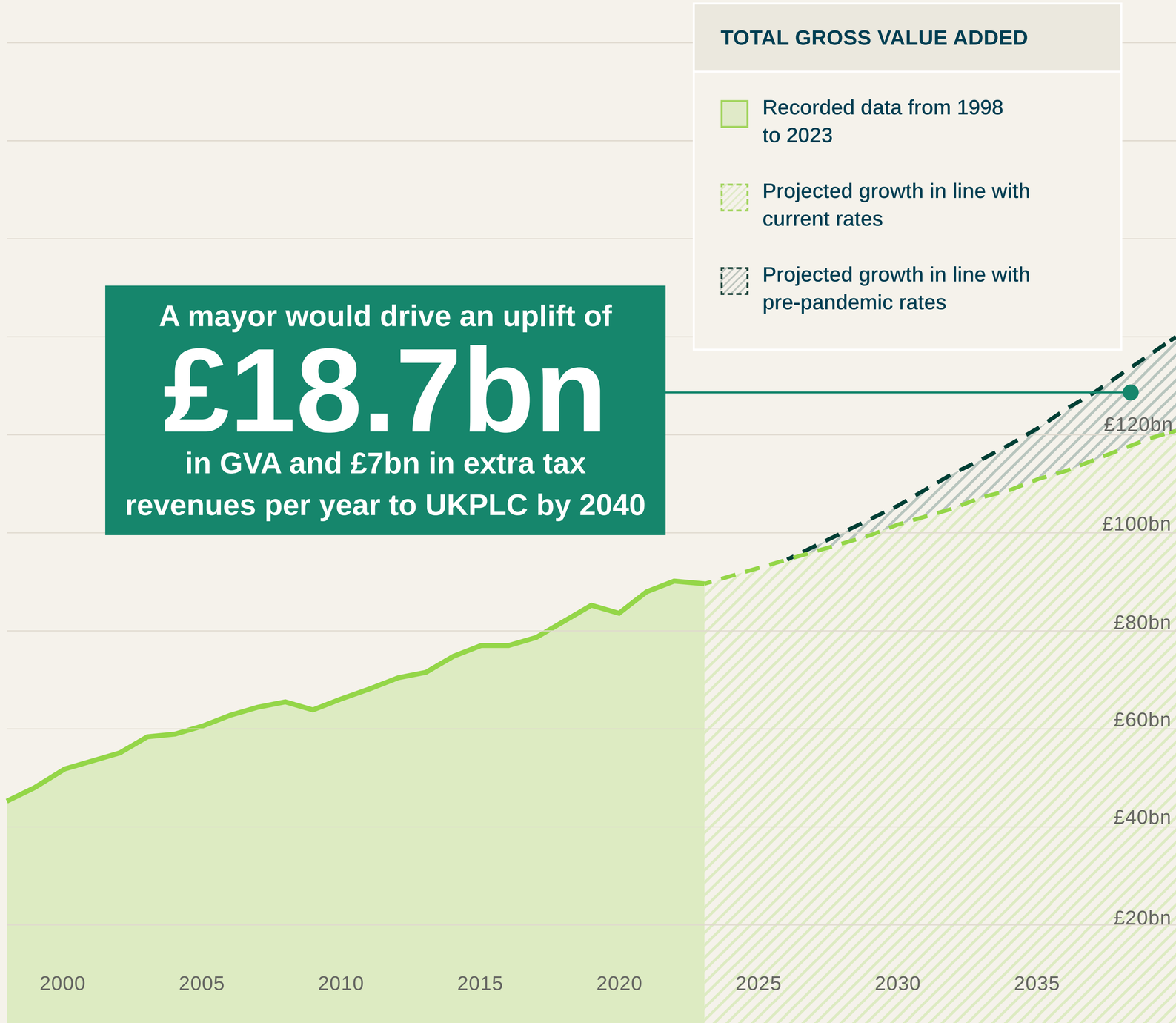
- Convening power and fundraising to deliver projects that unlock growth

Skills

- Joining up skills delivery for the first time

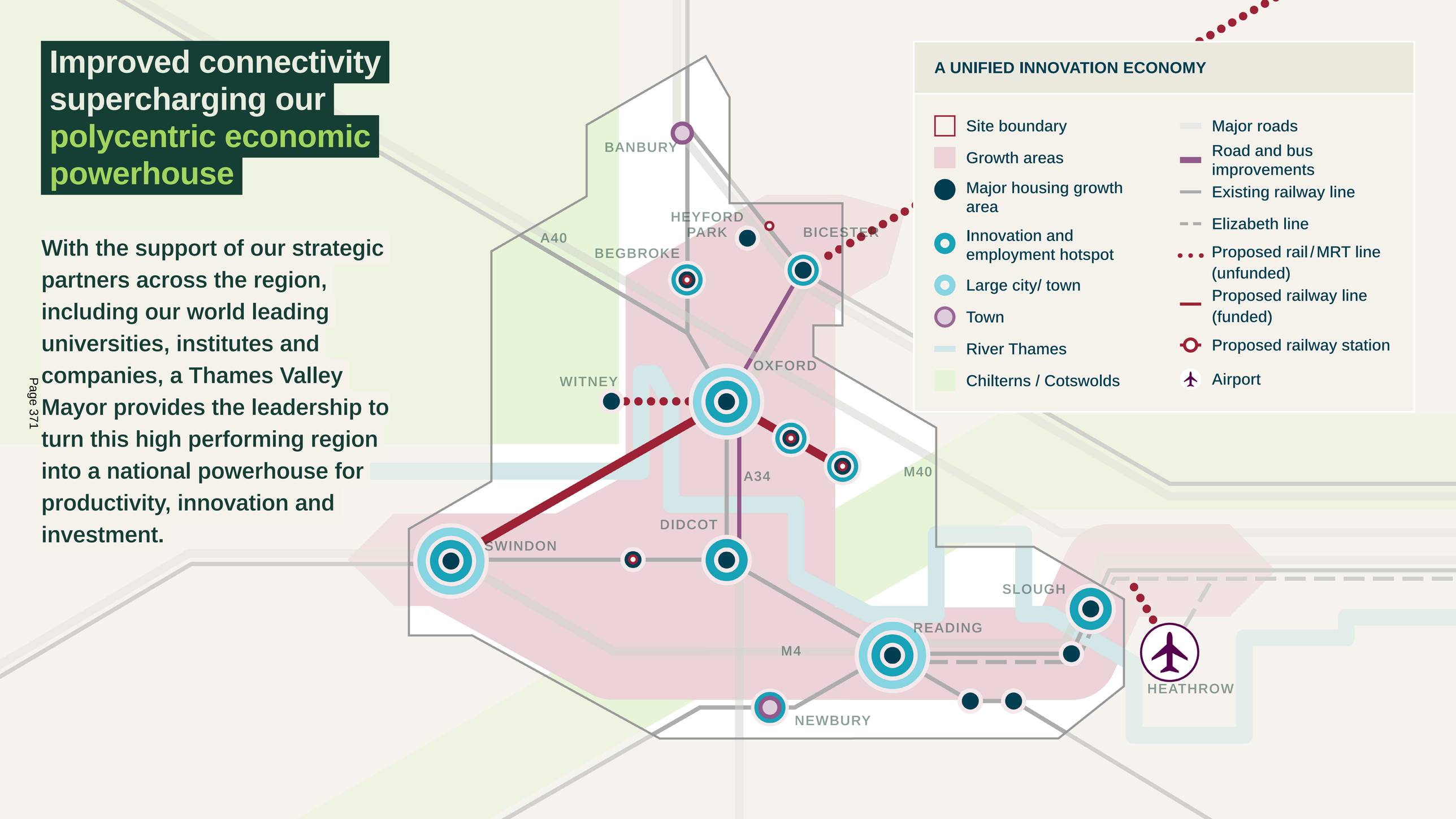
Funding

- A focus on capturing and retaining value locally, with less reliance on HMG
- Business Rate Retention Zones



Improved connectivity supercharging our polycentric economic powerhouse

With the support of our strategic partners across the region, including our world leading universities, institutes and companies, a Thames Valley Mayor provides the leadership to turn this high performing region into a national powerhouse for productivity, innovation and investment.



Thames Valley
Mayoral Strategic
Authority

Bracknell Forest Council

Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Reading Borough Council
Working better with you

Slough Borough Council

South Oxfordshire District Council

Swindon Borough Council

Vale of White Horse District Council

West Berkshire Council

Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead
www.rbwm.gov.uk

West Oxfordshire District Council

Wokingham Borough Council

The framework below sets out the statutory functions of **Non-Mayoral Foundation Strategic Authorities** as set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill and other legislation. As set out in the Devolution Framework in the English Devolution White Paper, different categories of Strategic Authorities are also guaranteed access to other non-statutory offers, including partnership and funding arrangements.

General Power

Statutory Function	Governance	Related Clauses
General Power of Competence This extends local authorities' general power of competence to combined and combined county authorities. This lets them do anything that an individual could do.	Can only be exercised for the purpose of economic development and regeneration.	Clause 20 and Schedule 4 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

Area of Competence: Transport and Infrastructure

Statutory Function	**Governance** – where "Standard" means: • Voting is a simple majority • Exercised solely by the SA	Related Clauses
Local Transport Authority functions Strategic Authorities are the Local Transport Authority for their area, with responsibility for preparing and publishing a local transport plan and powers to secure the provision of passenger transport services where not otherwise provided. Strategic Authorities also have powers and duties to prepare a bus strategy for carrying out their bus functions, enter into partnerships with bus operators, enter into franchising schemes, and manage travel concessions.	Standard However, adoption of the Local Transport Plan requires the consent of all constituent councils.	Clause 29 and Schedule 9 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: Transport Act 2000 – Part 2 Transport Act 1985 – Parts 4 and 5
Transport Levy Strategic Authorities can issue levies to their constituent authorities to meet the cost of exercising their transport functions, where otherwise not met.	Consent of all constituent councils required to agree the total sum. Apportionment between constituent councils is subject to the Transport Levying Bodies Regulations 1992.	Clause 13 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation:

		Local Government Finance Act 1988 – s.74
Agreements between authorities and strategic highways companies This allows Strategic Authorities to enter into agreements with local highway authorities (upper-tier local authorities) and/or National Highways to delegate or share the maintenance and improvement of roads.	Standard, with the exception that: • The function is exercised concurrently with local authorities. • Use of these functions requires the consent of the relevant constituent authority where the function would be exercised.	Clause 24 and Schedule 6 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: Highways Act 1980 – s.6 and 8
Civil enforcement of road traffic contraventions These powers enable Strategic Authorities to enforce parking, bus lane, and moving traffic contraventions through penalty charge notices. This is only possible if the relevant constituent council already has those functions and consents to the SA using them. The SA must follow existing statutory guidelines for charge levels for Fixed Penalty Notices and provide information on appeals processes.	Standard, with the exception that: • The function is exercised concurrently with local authorities. • Use of these functions requires the consent of the relevant constituent authority where the function would be exercised.	Clause 25 and Schedule 7 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: Part 6 and Schedule 8 of the Traffic Management Act 2004

Key Route Network Foundation Strategic Authorities can set up and coordinate a Key Route Network. This will allow the most important local roads to be strategically managed.	Standard Roads can only be included in the Key Route Network with the consent of the constituent council where they are located.	Clause 27 and Part 1 of Schedule 8 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 – s.107ZA Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 – s.22-24
Road User Charging These powers enable a Strategic Authority to make a joint road user charging scheme (e.g. congestion charging) with relevant constituent councils.	Standard, with the exception that this function can only be exercised jointly with the relevant constituent local traffic authority (the upper-tier local authority) where the scheme would take place.	Chapter I of Part III of the Transport Act 2000
On-Street Micromobility Schemes These powers enable Strategic Authorities, in their role as the Local Transport Authority, to license micromobility schemes operating on public roads and pavements. This allows them to have greater control of bike and e-bike rental schemes run by private companies. Other types of shared micromobility impacting on public space could also be included in the framework in the future.	Standard	Clause 23 and Schedule 5 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

Area of Competence: Skills and Employment Support

Statutory Function	Governance	Related Clauses
Adult Education Functions Subject to a transition period for new Strategic Authorities, some powers of the Secretary of State relating to education and training of adults will be devolved to Strategic Authorities. These powers support the delivery of devolved adult skills funding. Powers relating to apprenticeships and people subject to adult detention are not devolved.	The relevant functions in section 90 and 100 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 are exercised concurrently with the Secretary of State.	Clause 30 and Schedule 10 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Host legislation: Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 - s.86, s.87, s.88, s.90, s.100(1), s.100(1B)

Area of Competence: Housing and Strategic Planning

Statutory Function	Governance	Related Clauses
Spatial Development Strategy All Strategic Authorities will have a duty to produce a Spatial Development Strategy. These documents enable them to strategically plan for development across their whole area. *(Note: This will also be mirrored for all principal local authorities in areas without Strategic Authorities, where authorities will be required to collaborate via Strategic Planning Boards where necessary.)*	Standard	To be introduced through clause 52 of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill: Part 1A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
Housing and Land Powers, concurrent with Homes England These additional powers allow Strategic Authorities to acquire housing and land for the specific purposes (set out in the governance arrangements column). This includes powers to acquire land using the compulsory purchase powers previously solely held by Homes England. They also include the ability to provide financial assistance to any person, (again in line with the objectives set out in the governance arrangements column).	These functions are exercised concurrently with Homes England. In Foundation Strategic Authorities, use of compulsory purchase powers requires the consent of the local planning authority where the power is to be exercised (if different to the authority exercising the power). All of these functions must be exercised for the purposes of, or for purposes incidental to the objectives of:	Clause 34 and Part 1 of Schedule 15 (Acquisition and development of land) in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 – s.4A; 5-10; 19; Sch.2; Sch.3; Sch.4

	a. Improving the supply and quality of housing in the area; b. Securing the regeneration or development of land or infrastructure in the area; c. Supporting in other ways the creation, regeneration or development of communities in the area or their continued well-being; d. Contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and good design in the area.	
Housing and Land Powers, concurrent with Local Authorities These powers enable Strategic Authorities to acquire and develop housing and land as well as provide services in relation to housing. Local authorities in unitary local government areas already have these powers.	For county councils designated as Strategic Authorities, these functions are exercised concurrently with district councils. In Foundation Strategic Authorities, use of compulsory purchase powers requires the consent of the local planning authority where the power is to	Clause 34 (Acquisition and development of land); Clause 35 (Housing accommodation); Part 2 of Schedule 15; and Schedule 16 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Host legislation: Housing Act 1985 - s.8, 9, 11, 12, 17, 17A, 18, 56, 57.

	be exercised (if different to the authority exercising the power).	Town and Country Planning Act 1990 - s.226, 226A, 227, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 235, 236, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 246, 271, 272, 274, 275, 276, 278, 306, 366.

Area of Competence: Economic Development and Regeneration

Statutory Function	Governance	Related Clauses
Duty to prepare an assessment of economic conditions Strategic Authorities must prepare and maintain an assessment of the economic conditions of their area.	Standard, except that exercise of function is concurrent with local authorities.	Clause 37 and Schedule 18 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: S.69 of Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009
Power to pay grant to a constituent authority This power enables Strategic Authorities to pay grants to their constituent councils. This is most commonly used to pass funding for maintaining local roads to councils.	When paying grants for councils' road functions, Strategic Authorities must make sure payments are sufficient for them to exercise their functions.	Clause 39 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: s.32A of the Local Government Act 2003
Powers to encourage visitors and provide entertainment These powers enable Strategic Authorities to encourage people to visit their area and provide, support, and/or contribute to the provision of entertainments, such as concerts, plays, or exhibitions, and incur expenditure for	Standard, except that exercise of function is concurrent with local authorities.	Clause 40 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: s.144 and s.145 of the Local Government Act 1972.

these purposes. This includes powers to provide premises, facilities, or publicity for cultural and recreational events.		
Power to arrange for publication of information relating to the functions of the Strategic Authority These powers enable Strategic Authorities to arrange for the publication of information related to their functions as well as services available in the area. This means that they can collect, compile, and disseminate such information.	Standard, except that exercise of function is concurrent with local authorities.	Clause 42 and Paragraph 2 of Schedule 20 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: Local Government Act 1972 – s.142(2)
Power to place staff at the disposal of other authorities These powers enable Strategic Authorities to enter agreements with other Strategic Authorities, local authorities, and other organisations like the NHS, to share staff services for their functions.	Standard, except that the function can be exercised concurrently with other Strategic Authorities, local authorities or other bodies such as NHS England or Natural England.	Clause 42 and Paragraph 1 of Schedule 20 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: s.113 and 146A of the Local Government Act 1972
Power to prosecute and defend legal proceedings These powers allow Strategic Authorities to initiate or defend legal proceedings where they consider it expedient for	Standard, except that exercise of function is concurrent with local authorities.	Clause 42 and Paragraph 3 of Schedule 20 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

promoting or protecting the interests of the residents of their area. This includes the ability to prosecute, defend, or appear in any legal action and to institute proceedings in their own name to address local concerns.		Host legislation: s. 222 of the Local Government Act 1972.
Research and collection of information These powers enable Strategic Authorities to conduct research and collect information on matters concerning their area to support their functions and share their findings.	Standard, except that exercise of the function is concurrent with local authorities.	Clause 42 and Paragraph 4 of Schedule 20 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: s.88(1)(a) and (1)(b) of the Local Government Act 1985

Area of Competence: Environment and Net Zero

Statutory Function	Governance	Related Clauses
Heat Network Zoning coordination role This means that Strategic Authorities will be well placed to take forward heat network zones and create zone coordinators.	Standard	s228(5) of the Energy Act 2023

Area of Competence: Health, Wellbeing and Public Service Reform

Statutory Function	Governance	Related Clauses
A bespoke statutory health improvement and health inequalities duty When considering whether or how to use any of its powers and functions a Strategic Authority will have a duty to have regard to the need to improve the health of people in the Strategic Authority area and the need to reduce health inequalities in the local area.	Standard	Clause 43 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill

Area of Competence: Public Safety

Statutory Function	Governance	Related Clauses
Sharing of information in relation to crime and disorder These powers both enable and place a duty on Strategic Authorities to disclose information relating to the reduction of crime and disorder, including anti-social behaviour, to other relevant authorities (such as local authorities, social landlords and the police).	Standard, except that exercise of the function is concurrent with local authorities.	Clause 48 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill Host legislation: s.17A and s.115 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

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CABINET

21 April 2026

Cost of Living Programme 2026-29

Report by Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

   a) agree the proposed structure of the cost of living support programme for 2026-29.

   b) delegate authority to the Director of Public Affairs, Policy & Partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities to agree new areas of expenditure, and allocate funding from the Crisis and Resilience Fund during 2026-29.

Executive Summary

2. The government has announced a new three-year Crisis and Resilience fund to enable local authorities to support people experiencing financial crisis. The fund runs from 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029.

3. This report sets out the proposed approach to support those residents who are most negatively impacted by cost of living pressures over the next three financial years.

4. The report provides the latest position on the impact of cost of living pressures both nationally and locally; summarises how the 2025/26 funding was used; and sets out proposals for how Crisis and Resilience funding should be utilised in Oxfordshire over the next three years. These proposals have been informed by new government guidance and by a resident consultation in autumn 2025.

Introduction

5. In December 2025, the government announced the introduction of the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF). This replaced the Household Support Fund (HSF) which had been in place since 2021 and has been the main funding source for the council's Cost of Living programme.

6. In contrast with the HSF, which was renewed every year or in some case every six months, the new CRF is a three-year fund. This provides much

greater certainty over funding and allows the council to set up longer term support programmes with greater stability.

7. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will continue to be responsible for the CRF, which provides three years of funding for local authorities. The council's final CRF allocation is £4.82 million per annum. On 16 March 2026, the government made an additional £27 million available through the CRF to enable local authorities to support low-income households who use oil for heating. Oxfordshire's allocation of this funding is £440,000 and will be managed alongside the CRF funding but accounted for separately.

8. In Autumn 2025 consultation was undertaken on the Cost of Living programme, and the outcomes from the consultation have been considered in the design of the programme. Highlights of the consultation are included at paragraphs 43-47.

9. This report sets out the proposed categories of programme spend over the three years of the programme (2026-27 to 2028-29). Given that the programme needs to be developed before final reporting from existing programmes is received, broad categories of spend are being prepared for approval by Cabinet, with detail being developed into delivery plans under officer delegation.

Cost Of Living pressures

10. Nationally, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has reported that the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 3.0% in the 12 months to February 2026, which is down from 3.8% last summer. Whilst inflation is well down from the October 2022 peak of 11.1%, it remains significantly above the government's target of 2% and so continues to put pressure on household budgets.

11. The latest ONS survey on public opinions and social trends in January 2026 showed that the cost of living is considered the most important issue facing the UK today[1], mentioned by 88% of adults.

12. The Resolution Foundation have highlighted the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on households with low incomes, projecting in June 2025 that the 10th percentile of non-pensioners (middle of the bottom fifth) will be 4% worse off in 2029-30 than in 2024-25, and 8% (£1,000) worse off over the decade as a whole[2].

13. In terms of food insecurity, data from the Food Foundation has outlined that 12% of households reported experiencing food insecurity in January 2026, an increase from 11.3% in June 2025[3]. The Food Foundation's Food Prices Tracker from December 2025 shows that the cost of a typical basket of food

[1] Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics
[2] The Living Standards Outlook 2025 • Resolution Foundation
[3] Food Insecurity Tracking | Food Foundation

increased between 30.1%-35.9% since April 2022, showing the increased cost of food as a contributing factor towards food insecurity[4].

14. Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Winter 2025 Cost of Living Tracker surveyed UK households with incomes in the lowest 40%[5], finding:
    - 7.1 million households (60%) had gone without essentials in the previous 6 months, identical to the corresponding figures in the Summer 2025 tracker[6] and remaining above 7 million/60% for 4 consecutive years.
    - 52.6% (660,000) low-income households in the South-East were going without essentials. This was the lowest percentage of all the regions studied however still represents a significant section of the population.
    - 5.4 million low-income households had gone hungry, cut back or skipped meals in the last 30 days, with 1.4 million using a food bank in the last 6 months.
    - In terms of the most common essentials that low-income households reported going without:
        - Over 2.6 million households can't afford to keep their home warm.
        - Over 2.3 million households can't afford essential dental treatment.
        - 1.95 million households can't afford to replace or fix broken electrical goods.
        - Nearly 1.8 million households can't afford to make an essential journey.
    - The impacts of cost of living place many low-income families into a precarious financial position, with nearly 4 million households having borrowed to pay for essentials, and 70% of these currently in arrears. 21% of low-income households going without essentials have no available savings, with 50% having less than £150.

15. More locally, the Oxfordshire Data Hub reports that from the most recently published English Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025[7]:
    - 11 out of 428 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Oxfordshire are in the two most deprived deciles nationally. This shows that, despite Oxfordshire's relative affluence (as the 8th *least* deprived local authority area out of 153 upper-tier local authorities in terms of average LSOA rank), pockets of deprivation remain; most notably within the Leys areas in South Oxford, in parts of Banbury, in Littlemore and Rose Hill, and in sections of Abingdon Caldecott and West Witney.

16. The council's annual Residents Survey asks residents how they feel about their financial situation. In 2025 most respondents (57%) felt that their situation was worse off than last year, an increase from 46% in 2024. People with a disability or infirmity were more likely to feel worse off than those with no disability (63% to 53%). Promotion of discretionary support within the programme will therefore ensure that people with a disability are targeted for help.

[4] Food Prices Tracker: December 2025 | Food Foundation
[5] No let-up for millions of families in hardship: JRF's cost of living tracker, winter 2025 | Joseph Rowntree Foundation
[6] A year of Labour but no progress: JRF's cost of living tracker, summer 2025 | Joseph Rowntree Foundation
[7] Oxfordshire Data Hub – Oxfordshire Indices of Deprivation 2025 – Oxfordshire Data Hub

17. Data from Citizens Advice Oxfordshire's Impact Report for 2024-2025[8] reported:
    - That they had advised 20,432 clients and supported with 81,240 issues (an average of 4 issues for each client). This was an increase from 72,493 issues in 2023-2024.
    - 79% of issues Citizens Advice Oxfordshire supported with fell under the topics of:
        - Universal credit (22,599 issues)
        - Benefits and Tax Credits (20,091 issues)
        - Housing (6,917 issues), of which 1,271 related to homelessness.
        - Debt (5,579 issues)
        - Financial Services and Capability (5,360 issues)
        - Charitable Support and Good Banks (3,292 issues)
    - 197 issues a week were debt related.
    - 33 clients a week asked for help with food bank vouchers or charitable assistance for essential goods, with 24% of these describing their problem as urgent.

REVIEW OF 2025/26 PROGRAMME

18. The council's 2025/26 cost of living programme totalled £6.72 million. This comprised £5.92 million of HSF funding and £800,000 in council funding - £500,000 of which was for Emergency Welfare Support and £300,000 for advice services.

19. Table 1 below sets out the main areas of expenditure within the 25/26 programme, and below is a brief summary of these activities. Appendix One sets out the expenditure forecast for the full range of activities in the 2025/26 programme.

Table 1.

PROJECT	FUNDING (£)	FUNDING (%)
FSM Holiday Support	£3,490,000	51.90%
Residents Support Scheme	£1,700,000	25.28%
Delegations to City & Districts	£500,000	7.44%
Advice Services	£300,000	4.46%
Totals	£5,990,000	89.08%

Free School Meals Holiday Support
This funding provides support to families with children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) during the school holidays at the rate of £15 per eligible child, per week of holiday. This support is no longer eligible under the new Crisis and Resilience Fund, as is set out in paragraph 24.

Residents Support Scheme
This is an application-based scheme providing one-off support to households experiencing financial crisis. Support is provided for food (with supermarket vouchers), pre-paid energy meters (with credit vouchers) and household items

[8] Citizens Advice Oxfordshire Impact Report 2024-2025

such as furniture and white goods (the items themselves are delivered to the applicant).

Delegations to the City & Districts
This funding provided to the other Oxfordshire councils to meet locally identified need.

Advice Services
This funding enables Citizens Advice and four independent advice providers to provide additional cost of living support to residents.

20. The first nine months of the 2025/26 programme saw over 219,000 separate interventions made either in the form of crisis payments or supportive interventions. Highlights from last year's programme include the following:
    - School Snacks Initiative: This was a new project working with secondary schools with catchments in the county's most deprived areas. Funding was provided to make healthy snacks available to students from low-income backgrounds in a non-stigmatising manner. An initial pilot at the Oxford Academy saw a reduction in exclusions for the target cohort, and improved behaviour for learning. The initiative has now been rolled out to a further 3 schools and it is proposed to continue and expand this initiative from 2026/27 onwards.
    - Food Co-operatives: This was another new project to establish food co-operatives in communities where people are reliant on food banks and/or community larders. The project provides a sustainable model for people on low incomes as well as enabling participants to develop new skills and gain more agency over their lives. It is proposed to continue this project as it closely aligns with the government's aim for CRF of moving people away from crisis support and building their resilience.
    - Support for domestic abuse victim-survivors: This project was undertaken jointly with colleagues in Public Health and the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service. It created a fund to support the resettlement of people fleeing domestic abuse.
    - Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard: LIFT is a tool which uses locally held benefits data to create actionable campaigns to target people eligible for benefits they are not receiving, or for preventative support interventions. It is proposed to continue this project as LIFT has delivered additional income for residents of £1.5 million (more than five times its cost), as well as a range of other benefits. Further details of the use of LIFT are set out in Appendix Three.
    - Support for local organisations: 264 local organisations have benefitted from programme funding across a wide range of sectors and locations. A list of benefiting organisations is included in Appendix 2.

CRISIS AND RESILIENCE FUND

21. The Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF) brings a new emphasis to the way cost of living support is delivered. It puts a greater focus on addressing the circumstances of households experiencing deprivation and sets out three main outcomes to be achieved:
    - Provision of effective crisis support

- Improving individuals' financial resilience
- Bolstering the local support landscape

22. There are four areas of expenditure permitted within CRF to address these outcomes:
    - Crisis Payments
    - Resilience Services
    - Community Co-ordination (connecting and enhancing the local support landscape)
    - Housing Payments*

    *Housing Payments replace the existing Discretionary Housing Payment regime which is managed at the city and district council level. DWP will make separate allocations to the second-tier authorities for the first two years of CRF. In year three these will be combined on the assumption that all areas will be unitarised at that point.

23. The CRF brings in a number of changes which will impact the delivery of support from 2026-27. The most significant difference is to ensure that, where crisis support is provided, it is based on an assessment of need at that point in time, and that this is connected to an offer of "Resilience Support".

24. DWP are clear that this means that local authorities should not be providing blanket crisis support to cohorts of individuals and specifically cite the provision of support to families of Free School Meals (FSM) eligible households in the school holidays as an example of this. As such this current area of expenditure will come to an end in April 2026, with a final one-week payment being made this Easter.

25. With expenditure on support for FSM eligible households accounting for almost two thirds of this year's allocation, this represents a significant change in how the new programme will be structured. The new programme aims to continue supporting low-income families, but in much more targeted ways, details of which are set out below.

FUNDING 2026-29

26. The government's Fair Funding Review has led to a further reduction in cost of living funding for Oxfordshire as shown below:
    - HSF Funding 2024-25 - £6.72 million
    - HSF Funding 2025-26 - £5.92 million
    - CRF Funding 2026-29 - £4.82 million p.a. (plus £440,000 in 2026-27 to support people using oil for heating)

27. Additionally 2025-26 represents the last year of a council three-year budget provision, made in 2022, of £500,000 p.a. for Emergency Welfare Support. This means that cost of living funding in 2026-27 will be £2 million less than for 2024-25, and £2.4 million less from 2027-28.

COST OF LIVING PROGRAMME 2026-29

28. The cost of living programme for 2026-27 comprises CRF funding from government of £4.82 million, the additional CRF award of £440,000 to support people using oil for heating, and council budget provision for advice services of £300,000, totalling £5.56 million per annum. For 2027-28 and 2028-29, after the support for oil heating drops out, it will be £5.12 million.

29. In order to secure CRF funding the programme must be delivered in accordance with DWP's guidance on the use of the fund. This includes maintaining an application-based crisis payment scheme which is available all year round. In Oxfordshire we have had such a scheme in place since 2023. Guidance on reporting management information to DWP and advertising the programme must also be complied with.

30. The new three-year programme has been designed to support the council's Strategic Plan and other key objectives. Programme activities support the objectives of making the county fairer and healthier, and will directly impact the following strategic objectives:
    - Roll out a network of Family Hubs
    - Increase the number of children who reach a good level of development at age 5

    Additionally, the programme supports the Marmot objectives of:
    - Giving every child the best start in life
    - Ensuring a healthy standard of living for all

31. Due to the ending of the support in school holidays for FSM eligible children, new areas of funding include supporting the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and funding to expand the services delivered through our new Family Hubs. These are services that will support the most in-need families who would previously have benefited from the school holiday support.

32. The 2026-29 Cost of Living programme reserves a small proportion of expenditure to be determined during the year. This is to support emerging needs or to meet additional demand in relation to some programme activities. Cabinet will be requested to delegate authority to the Cabinet member for Public Health and Inequalities in conjunction with the Director of Public Affairs, Policy & Partnerships to agree new areas of expenditure, and allocate funding during 2026-29.

33. The proposed Cost of Living programme for 2026-29 is summarised in Table 2 below. Appendix 4 provides a short summary of each area of activity.

Table 2.

Area of Expenditure	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
CRISIS SUPPORT			
Residents Support Scheme	£1,850,000	£1,850,000	£1,850,000
Healthy Snacks in School	£100,000	£100,000	£100,000
Hospital Discharge	£15,000	£15,000	£15,000
Period Poverty	£15,000	£15,000	£15,000
Better Housing Better Health	£25,000	£25,000	£25,000
Migrant Food	£25,000	£25,000	£25,000
Oil heating costs	£440,000		
RESILIENCE SERVICES			
Advice Services	£300,000	£300,000	£300,000
LIFT	£140,000	£140,000	£140,000
HAF Programme	£500,000	£500,000	£500,000
Food Co-operatives	£88,000	£97,000	£102,000
Living Essentials Grants	£115,000	£116,000	£117,000
COMMUNITY CO-ORDINATION			
Local Co-ordination	£180,000	£180,000	£180,000
Hygiene Essentials	£60,000	£50,000	£40,000
Food infrastructure	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000
Winter Warmth (Libraries)	£1,500	£1,500	£1,500
MIX OF ACTIVITY			
Support for Early Years	£250,000	£250,000	£250,000
District Delegations	£500,000	£500,000	£500,000
Family Hub Programme	£500,000	£500,000	£500,000
Community larders	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000
OTHER			
In-year expenditure	£75,500	£75,500	£79,500
Admin	£180,000	£180,000	£180,000
TOTALS	£5,560,000	£5,120,000	£5,120,000

Financial Implications

34. There are no new budgetary implications from these recommendations, although it should be noted that the report addresses expenditure within the Council's budget. This is the £300,000 recurrent provision for advice services.

35. The main financial risks are related to the potential for additional demand in relation to the Residents Support Scheme (RSS). Whilst there a number of factors that influence demand, a new area of risk relates to the withdrawal of support in the school holidays to FSM eligible families. The budget for this area of expenditure has been increased and funding reserved for allocation during the programme could also be used to top up programmes experiencing high demand.

Comments checked by: Bick Nguyen-McBride, Finance Business Partner, bick.nguyen-mcbride@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

36. Government is able to provide the household support grant to local authorities under section 31 Local Government Act 2003 to which conditions are attached. Spending of grant funding under section 31 Local Government Act 2023 is an executive function and under the Constitution Cabinet holds responsibility for this function.

37. Where any grant constitutes a subsidy, the Council must comply with the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and, where necessary, carry out a subsidy control assessment to ensure that the grant is compliant with the subsidy control principles.

38. In providing the support detailed in this report the Council, pursuant to its general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, is able to determine the appropriate allocations of funding, provided that grant conditions are met.

    Comments checked by: Jay Akbar, Head of Legal & Governance, jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

39. HSF funding is currently used to fund two members of staff to coordinate and support the programme: a programme manager and a business support officer, shared with The Migration Partnership. It is proposed to continue this arrangement in the new programme from 2026-29.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

40. The cost of living programme aims to tackle some of the most egregious areas of inequality in Oxfordshire by ensuring those in need can access food, energy and essential household items. The overall support package is designed to meet the needs of the most economically disadvantaged residents in Oxfordshire, and funding flows disproportionately towards the most deprived wards in the county. Monitoring will be undertaken within the new programme to identify the impact of changes in support on vulnerable groups.

Sustainability Implications

41. There are no significant impacts in respect of environmental sustainability in this programme. The programme supports the Better Housing Better Health work, which provides advice and financial support to residents on energy use and energy efficiency measures. Funding is also being made available to Good Food Oxfordshire whose work supports sustainable approaches to food support.

Risk Management

42. The main identified risks to the cost of living programme are summarised below:
    - Overspend of funding – the largest area of funding is demand led (Residents Support Scheme). The budget for this area has been increased, and the scheme has several mechanisms for increasing or reducing support to ensure expenditure remains within budget.
    - Low take-up of Residents Support Scheme (RSS) either generally, or in relation to specific groups – ongoing work to communicate the availability of the RSS is required to ensure it supports the most economically disadvantaged groups in the county. Monthly monitoring will be undertaken to identify any groups or areas where take-up is lower than expected. Where low take-up is identified work will be undertaken with relevant organisations and community groups to promote the scheme.

Consultations

43. In autumn 2025 a consultation was undertaken including residents who had accessed cost of living support. This included a survey, stakeholder workshop (involving partner organisations) and interviews with residents. The consultation outcome will be published on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire portal after Cabinet have agreed the new programme.

44. Key learning from engagement with residents was as follows:
    - Many respondents were unaware of the range of support available
    - Residents prioritised support for families with young children, older people, carers of any age (including young people), people with disabilities, and those with mental and physical health needs
    - Concerns included rising costs of care, food, heating, transport, and housing accessibility.
    - Suggestions on improving communication included expand outreach efforts to include offline channels, such as physical newsletters, notices in community centres, and promotion through local charities, community and faith groups, translated materials, together with accessible marketing messaging (including spoken translation services) adapted to various methods of communications (WhatsApp, Facebook, SMS etc.) for non-English speakers.

45. It is essential that support gets to those communities and individuals most in need. As such the new programme will prioritise resource to communicate the availability of support in line with the suggestions set out above.

46. In the stakeholder workshop participants expressed concern over the short-term nature of current funding streams, which limits the ability to plan and invest in preventative measures. There was a strong call for multi-year, core funding to enable stability and long-term impact. It was felt that the prevailing approach remains crisis-oriented, but there is consensus that a shift towards prevention—such as life skills training, financial literacy, and community resilience—is essential for sustainable change. There was a strong preference for

empowering local councils and trusted partners to deliver support, recognising their understanding of community needs and ability to distribute funds effectively. Specific suggestions included:

- Cooking Skills and Education: Stakeholders highlighted the importance of practical cooking classes to help residents make nutritious meals on a budget. Suggestions included community kitchens and partnerships with local colleges
- Wrap-Around Support: Food aid should not stand alone; it needs to be integrated with advice on budgeting, mental health, and employment. This holistic approach was seen as key to reducing stigma and improving uptake

47. Many of the changes within the CRF address the concerns of stakeholders. The fund is provided over three years which enables activity to be properly planned. There is more emphasis on addressing the underlying causes which result in crisis presentations, and to increase the financial resilience of residents. The requirement within the CRF for expenditure on community co-ordination, will see more money made available to local areas than in previous programme rounds, despite the reduction in funding overall. In relation to the specific suggestions above, Cooking Skills will be included in the proposed food infrastructure project which will support the delivery of the Oxfordshire Food Strategy. Wrap around support is a key element of the support for community larders (both shown in Table 2. above).

Report by Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

Annex:	Appendix 1 – Expenditure forecast for 20256-26 Appendix 2 - Organisations benefitting from Cost of Living funding Appendix 3 - Use of Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard Appendix 4 - Summary of proposed activity for 2026-29
Contact Officer:	Paul Wilding, Cost of Living Manager, paul.wilding@oxfordshire.gov.uk

April 2026

Appendix One – Expenditure Forecast for 2025-26

1. A summary of the forecast outturn for the 2025-26 Cost of Living programme is shown in Table 3 below.

2. The total cost of budgeted projects is higher than the total programme budget. This is due to new projects being commissioned during the year which make use of identified underspends.

3. The two largest areas of variance are for the Residents Support Scheme (RSS) and Free School Meals support in the school holidays. There was limited promotion of the RSS this year. This is because it was expected that the Cost of Living programme consultation work would also serve as a promotional tool. However the impact of the consultation appears to have been to bring demand forward instead of creating new demand. It is expected that there will be greater demand for RSS in 2026/27, however if this is not seen in the quarter one data then an uptake campaign will be undertaken.

4. The expenditure on holiday support to FSM eligible households is forecasting an overspend. This is because an additional week's payment has been programmed in for Easter since the publication of the Crisis & Resilience Fund guidance. As set out in the body of the report, local authorities can no longer provide support to all recipients of FSM. If this support was to continue then the costs would come from the new CRF programme. However, to give households time to adjust to the withdrawal of this support, it is desirable to make an additional payment at Easter from the current year's programme.

Table 3.

Project	Budget	Projected Outturn	Variance
Free School Meals	£3,370,000	£3,490,000	-£120,000
Residents Support Scheme	£1,700,000	£1,500,000	£200,000
City & District delegations	£500,000	£500,000	£0
OCF Grants	£140,000	£140,000	£0
Hospital Discharge	£25,000	£25,000	£0
Migrant Food	£20,000	£20,000	£0
Healthy Snacks	£40,000	£40,000	£0
Period Poverty	£15,000	£15,000	£0
Community Larders	£100,000	£100,000	£0
Food Co-operatives	£58,000	£58,000	£0
InKind	£28,000	£28,000	£0
Youth Ambition	£5,000	£5,120	-£120
Banbury Larder	£10,000	£10,000	£0
Winter Warmth	£1,000	£1,000	£0
Good Food Oxfordshire	£63,000	£63,000	£0
Domestic Abuse Support	£27,500	£27,500	£0
Housing Support	£25,000	£25,000	£0
LIFT Dashboard	£140,000	£140,000	£0
Better Housing Better Health	£25,000	£25,000	£0
Advice Services	£300,000	£300,000	£0
Community Wealth Building	£85,000	£85,000	£0
Programme Admin	£125,000	£127,000	-£2,000
Totals	£6,802,500	£6,724,620	£77,880
Cost of Living Budget	£6,724,114		
Variance to budget	£506		

Appendix Two – Organisations benefitting from Cost of Living funding

This appendix provides a list of local organisations who have received funding or other support from the 2025/26 Cost of Living programme. The organisations below have been supported by one or more of the following projects:

- Oxfordshire Community Foundation's Living Essentials grant round
- Good Food Oxfordshire's grants programme
- Delegations to City and District Councils
- Provision of hygiene products from In-Kind Direct
- Healthy Snacks in Schools

The organisations receiving support are as follows:

A2Dominion
Abingdon Community Fridge
Abingdon Foodbank
African & African Caribbean Kultural Heritage Initiative
African Families in the UK (AFiUK) CIC
Agnes Smith Advice Centre
All Yours Period Box CIC
Apollos Clothing
Asylum Welcome
Banbury Foodbank
Banbury Mosque – Community Fridge
Banbury Mosque Green Dome
Banbury Salvation Army
Barton Advice Centre
Barton Community Association
Barton Community Association (Barton Cafe
Barton Leisure Centre Community Fridge
Barton Neighbourhood Centre
Barton Summer Youth Club
Barton United FC
Be Free Young Carers
Beautiful Barton
Begbroke Playgroup
Berinsfield Community Association
Berry Youth Centre
Bicester Baby Bank and Surrounding Villages
Bicester Community fridge
Bicester Community Hub
Bicester Foodbank (Open Door Cafe)
Bicester Open Doors
Bicester Refugees
BK Luwo Group
Blackbird Leys Adventure Playground
Blackbird Leys Community Fridge
Bloxham Baptist Church
Body Mind & Soul 4 You CIC
Botley Bikers
Botley Bridges Xmas Hampers
Botley Community Larder
Breakfast at the Barn
Bridge Street Garden
Bullingdon Community Lunch
Butterflies Pre-School
BYHP
Café 103 - Orchard Baptist Church
Cheney School
Children Heard and Seen
Cholsey Day Centre Trust
Cholsey School
Cholsey Volunteers Trust
Citizens Advice North Oxfordhire
Citizens Advice Oxfordshire
Citizens Advice/ Energy Matters
City of Oxford College
Clean Slate
Communi-Tea Café
Community Researching Littlemore
Connection Support
Cornerstone Christian Centre
Cornerstone project - Charlbury PCC
Cropredy food support
Cutteslowe and District Community Centre
Cutteslowe Community Larder
Cutteslowe EID Celebration
Cutteslowe Greenhouse
Damascus Rose Kitchen
Daybreak - Rosewood
Daybreak Oxford
Dementia Active
Dentaid

Didcot Baby Monday
Didcot Baptist Church
Didcot Community Kitchen
Donnington over 60's coffee morning
Dovecote
Down to Earth Community Cafe CIC
East Timor Mothers Co-op
Edge Housing
Elmore Community Services
EMBS Community College
Emmaus Oxford
FarmAbility
First Steps Baby Bank
Florence Park Community Association
Flo's in the Park (People, Place and Participation)
Food for charities - Botley Larder
Forest School Camps
Fringford Village Hall
Fusion Arts
Godstow Cottage (Mother and Baby)
Good Food Oxfordshire
Good Salt CIC
Grandpont Nursery School and Childcare
Grimsbury Community Association
Grimsbury Community Centre
Grove Day Centre for the Elderly
GroW Families
(Grove and Wantage Family Community Group)
Hanwell Fields Community School
Harvest@home -Cherwell Collective
HeartyEarth
Hendreds Environment Group
Henley on Thames Churches debt centre
Henley YMCA
Henry Box School
Hill Banbury CIC
Hill View Primary School
Home Start Banbury, Bicester & Chipping Norton
Home Start Oxford
Homeless People and the Oxford Churches
Home-Start
Hooky Neighbours Pantry
Hygiene Bank - Oxford
In Kind Direct
Iraqi Women Art and War CIC
Jericho Pantry
Just Love Oxford
Kennington Mother and Toddler Group
Kennington Pre-School
Lake Street Nursery
Leys CDI Youth Club
Life Centre (Wychwood)
Life House
Littlemore Community Association
Longworth Parish Council
Love Barton
Love Barton Freezer
Maple Tree
Marston Court Care Home
Matilda House - (A2 Dominion)
Matthew Wigglesworth House
Millstream Day Centre
Mind Families Group
Mind Housing
Mind in Abingdon (Oxfordshire Mind)
North Abingdon PCC for Abingdon Foodbank
North Hinksey Preschool
North Oxford Association Lunch Club
North Oxfordshire Academy
North Oxfordshire Community Foodbank
North Oxon Foodbank
Northway Together CIC
OCA Leys Lunch
O'Hanlon House (Homeless Oxfordshire)
One-Eighty
Open Door
Open Doors (Bicester Christian Action)
Oxford Blackbirds
Oxford Chabad Society
Oxford Churches Debt Centre
Oxford City Community Fridge
Oxford Community Action
Oxford Community Breakfast
Oxford Community Education
Oxford Community Soup Kitchen
Oxford Gatehouse
Oxford Homeless Project
Oxford Hub (at Windale school)
Oxford Initiatives (The Jungle)
Oxford Mutual Aid
Oxford Winter Night Shelter (The Living Room)
Oxfordshire African Carribean Multicultural Association
Oxfordshire Asian Women's Voice
Oxfordshire Community Education Group
Breadline Project
Oxfordshire Crossroads Care
Oxfordshire Play Association
Oxfordshire Young Parents (A2 Dominion)
Oxfordshire Youth
Parish of Cowley St John
Pause Oxfordshire
Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEPLE)
People's Baptist Church Oxford
RCCG Christ's Love Assembly
Red Kite Family Centre

Restore @ Elder Stubbs
Ronald McDonald House
Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre
Rose Hill Community Fun day
Rose Hill Community Larder
Rose Hill Junior Youth Club
Rose Hill Methodist Church
Royal Voluntary Service - Cornhill Centre
Ruskin College
Saint Mary church
Salvation Army
Sharing Life Trust
SKIPS Pre-School
Slade Nursery
SOFEA
South Oxford Adventure Playground
Spiced Roots Community CIC
Springwater Foodbank
SSNAP
St Andrew's Luncheon Club
St Christophers School
St Helen Without Parish Council
St John the Baptist (Grove)
St Johns the Baptist Church (Kingston Bagpuize)
St Mary & St Nicholas Church
St Mary's Church, Banbury
St Michael's Church
St Nicholas Church Eco-Hub
St Nicholas Primary School
St Vincent de Paul Church Hinksey Branch
Stonewater
Style Acre
Summertown Stars Football Club
Sunrise Multicultural Project
Sustainable Didcot
Synolos CIC
SYRCOX
Syrian Community Oxfordshire
Syrian Sisters
Syrox Food Larder
Thame Barns Centre
Thameside Primary School
The Appleton Trust
The Banbury Larder
The Berin Centre
The Branch Trust
The Chiltern Centre Limited
The Gatehouse
The Hill
The Living Room
The Mill (Oxfordshire Mind)
The Oxford Academy
The Oxford Well-Being Co-op
The Porch (formerly Stepping Stones)
The Ray Collins Charitable Trust
The Sunshine Centre
The Valentine Club (over 50s)
Thomas Gifford Trust
Three Parishes Community Fridge
Thrive OX7
TRAIN
Transition Lighthouse Empowerment Space CIC
Trax
Tyndale community school
Unrebel Housing
UrHome.church
Vale Community Impact
Vale House
Wallingford Baptist Church
Wallingford Emergency Food Bank
Wallingford Family Centre
Wantage and Grove Foodbank
Wantage Parish
Waste2Taste CIC
Wempowered CIC
Wheatley Parochial Church Council
Whitchurch Preschool
White Hart
Wigod Way Wallingford Family Centre
Windale Primary School
WISH -Cherwell Collective
Witney & West Oxfordshire Foodbank
Witney Baby Bank
Witney Food Revolution
Wolvercote Young People's Club
Wootton and Dry Sandford Community Centre
Wootton Parish Council
Yellow Submarine Cafe
YMCA Henley
Youth Ambition

Appendix Three – Use of Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Dashboard

1. The County Council purchased the LIFT Dashboard on behalf of all the Oxfordshire authorities at the end of 2024. LIFT is a product developed and provided by the organisation Policy in Practice. It is a platform that provides insight into low-income families by aggregating local authority and some publicly available datasets, including the Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) which holds data in relation to the assessment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. The aggregated information can be segmented to be used in targeted campaigns to support prevention and take-up, with the following being just a few examples:
    - Benefits and Discretionary Housing Payments take up
    - Homelessness prevention
    - Tackling arrears
    - Employment support
    - Access to Childcare
    - Free school meals take up

2. The dashboard also provides a rich source of data that can be used to help target Household Support Fund monies and similar, or to inform strategies related to the above areas. It is also used in some authorities to provide a single view of debt.

Deployment in Oxfordshire

3. The critical datasets used in LIFT are the data used for assessing Housing Benefit and Council Tax support. As this data is not able to be shared, the Dashboard is deployed at the city and district council level. Each authority manages campaigns for their own area. The county council is able to view the data held in LIFT, but only down to ward level. A steering group co-ordinates the work on LIFT to ensure all areas are making use of the dashboard and to co-ordinate relevant countywide campaigns (e.g. Free School Meals uptake). The Dashboard has been implemented at different speeds across the county, but since October 2025, all councils have been able to use it.

Update on campaigns

4. Pension credit has been the most successful type of campaign. Three local councils have run one or more campaigns to increase pension credit claims. This has resulted in 212 new claimants generating £827,417 of income in one year, and an ongoing annual entitlement of £662,341. Due to the time taken to assess new claims for Pension Credit this number is expected to increase in respect of campaigns undertaken this winter.

5. Two councils undertook Free School Meals campaigns last summer resulting in 83 new claims. This is worth £40,670 to families and £107,485 to schools as a result of additional Pupil Premium funding.

6. Cherwell used LIFT to enrol 1,276 people in You Move (a programme to enable low income households to access free or low costs activities). They have collaborated with Sanctuary Housing, importing tenancy data to identify

households at risk of losing their tenancy for additional support. LIFT has also helped them to target 168 households who have higher outgoings than income to provide a food voucher as part of their cost of living support.

7. West Oxfordshire have undertaken the following activities:
    - In partnership with Citizens Advice(CA) have targeted 225 households with low financial resilience to offer support from CA
    - Offered 857 households impacted by welfare reforms a Discretionary Housing Payment
    - Contacted 550 Universal Credit customers who were not claiming Council Tax Support (with 210 now receiving CTS)
    - Inviting 47 customers on Council Tax Support, and in arrears, to claim from their Exceptional Hardship Fund.

8. Oxford City Council have used LIFT to target residents who would benefit from attending local community advice sessions. They have also identified 33 council tenants in need of support from their homelessness prevention team.

9. LIFT has already provided an additional £1.5 million in income for residents. In addition it has enabled a range of preventative interventions to be undertaken, reducing the potential need for costly interventions by councils in the future.

Appendix Four – Summary of proposed activity for 2026-29

This appendix provides a short summary of, and rationale for the proposed Cost of Living activity set out in the body of the main report.

CRISIS SUPPORT

Residents Support Scheme (RSS)

This is the council's application based crisis scheme. It is the only area of activity that the government requires us to undertake. The scheme provides support for food costs (by voucher), credit for pre-payment energy meters, and household items (e.g. white goods, and furniture). As of 31 January 2026, there had been 4,085 successful applications to the scheme.

Healthy Snacks in School

This project began as a pilot with The Oxford Academy. It was a joint piece of work involving the school, Childrens Services and the City Council. The school has a high proportion of pupils from deprived backgrounds and staff were identifying significant levels of hunger in this cohort resulting in significant disruption. Funding was used to make healthy snacks available in school. Although this was available to all pupils, it was managed by the school to ensure priority to the target cohort. Student teachers evaluated the impact of the one term project and found significant improvement in behaviour for learning, and a sharp drop in exclusions. The funding has therefore continued, and the project has been rolled out to another three schools with catchments in the council's most deprived areas.

Hospital Discharge

This project provides a small amount of funding to support the work of the Out of Hospital team. This is a multi-disciplinary team which works to support the delayed discharge of people from hospital, where a Housing issue is a barrier to discharge. Support is provided to help residents with energy costs for essential equipment or medicine arising from a disability, and to allow people with disabilities to manage their conditions, remain independent, and avoid social isolation.

Period Poverty

This initiative followed a motion to Full Council in September 2023 which resulted in a six month pilot providing period products (including reusable items) and surveying people accessing them. 90% of respondents said the project had a positive impact on their wellbeing and dignity, and 60% were supportive of using reusable products. Products were discreetly advertised and displayed within library settings, usually in the 'Health and Wellbeing' section alongside signposting to other services such as debt advice, drug and alcohol treatment or support for victims of domestic violence. The Cost of Living programme has continued to fund this work since the pilot, with Library Services now managing the stock.

Better Housing Better Health (BHBH)

The BHBH programme is commissioned by Public Health to provide advice and practical support with energy efficiency measures and supporting people to meet their energy costs. The CRF funding enables the service to meet the cost of products to improve energy efficiency (e.g. radiator foil, LED lightbulbs) and to provide support for energy costs where required.

Migrant Food
This project was developed with Asylum Welcome after they had raised the challenges for some migrants with specific dietary requirements. It provides support to migrants residing in hotels and dispersed accommodation where the food provision is not meeting the needs for people with relevant medical conditions (e.g. diabetes) or who are pregnant. The project is currently supporting 29 migrants. Asylum Welcome are required to request that the asylum hotels cater for any identified dietary needs. There is limited success from these requests, the output of which is shared with colleagues in The Migration Partnership to take up with their contacts in the Home Office.

RESILIENCE SERVICES
Advice Services
Support for debt and benefits advice has formed part of previous cost of living programmes. This was previously paid for by a contribution from the Budget Priorities Reserve to supplement Household Support Fund money from government in 2022/23 and 2023/24. Funding has been used to support the two Citizens Advice offices in Oxfordshire as well as four independent advice providers. Since 2024/25 a £300,000 allocation in the Council's budget to this area has enabled advice services to continue to be supported. This funding enables an additional 6,000 people to be advised on Cost of Living related issues annually.

LIFT Dashboard
See Appendix Three for details of this work.

HAF Programme
The Cost of Living Programme is putting additional funding into the Council's Holiday Activities and Food programme. This programme commissions activities for eligible children to attend and includes physical activity, enriching activities and the provision of a healthy meal. As the CRF no longer permits local authorities to provide financial support to all FSM eligible households in the school holidays, expanding the HAF programme ensures this group will still benefit from Cost of Living support. The Cost of Living programme manager has joined the HAF Steering Group to support the development of the programme.

Food Co-operatives
This project commenced last autumn following research commissioned by the Cost of Living programme into more sustainable approaches to community food support. The research highlighted the development of food co-ops as the best option to develop locally. The project is being delivered by Oxford Community Action, Oxford Mutual Aid and Flo's in East Oxford. These organisations are rooted in the local community and have a strong track record in supporting the community to help themselves. Although the project is in its early stages there is already a lot of engagement locally and one co-op comprising women from East Timor has already been established. The project aims to have over one thousand people benefitting from participation in a co-op by the end of the three year programme.

Living Essentials Grants
Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) have helped the council to channel HSF funding to grassroots organisations for a number of years. This has been delivered

through grant programmes which support the delivery of HSF outcomes; supporting people with unaffordable essentials such as housing, food and heating as well as debt advice. As well as supporting those in need in local communities, OCF enables small community organisations to access funding which would otherwise be closed off to them.

COMMUNITY CO-ORDINATION

Local Co-ordination

Community Co-ordination is a new area of expenditure brought in by the CRF. The guidance from DWP describes this as creating a more connected local welfare landscape. This project will focus on connecting support in areas within the 20% most deprived wards in the country (within Oxford, Banbury, Witney and Abingdon). The programme is engaged with the city and district councils and some voluntary and community sector organisations to design a bespoke approach in each area. The majority of this funding allocation will be spent in Oxford and Banbury.

Hygiene Essentials

This will be delivered by In-Kind Direct who are a charity that utilise relationships with corporate partners to access low cost hygiene products. These are then usually made available to community and charitable organisations at a low cost. In 25/26 the cost of living programme spent £28,000 to provide free credit to local community organisations. This resulted in 155 organisations accessing £138,175 worth of products to pass on to residents in need.

Food infrastructure

This project has been developed in conjunction with Public Health and Good Food Oxfordshire to continue the delivery of The Oxfordshire Food Strategy. The strategy seeks to develop sustainable approaches to helping people on low incomes access affordable, healthy food and this work should be supported from the Cost of Living programme. The project will include the following:

- Unlocking school kitchens to use as community assets
- Accreditation of Community Food services
- Providing training and workshops on community cooking
- Embedding the Making Every Contact Count approach when working with communities

Winter Warmth (Libraries)

This funding supports our Libraries to be part of the Winter Warm Space provision by funding the cost of providing hot drinks.

MIX OF ACTIVITY

Support for Early Years

Alongside the support that has been provided to families with FSM eligible children in the school holidays, equivalent support has also been provided to households accessing free childcare hours. The Early Years team are concerned that the withdrawal of this support will lead to a reduction in the take up of free childcare, as it has been seen as an incentive by parents. The Early Years team are working with the Cost of Living programme to use this funding allocation to increase take up of childcare within the CRF eligibility requirements.

District Delegations
In previous funding rounds, the County Council has delegated funding to the City and District Councils to establish local emergency welfare schemes and provide related community support. Funding is allocated against a formula that takes into account population and relative deprivation. Local intelligence enables flexible support to be delivered that aligns with existing local provision, avoiding duplication and maximising impact. To maintain the impact of local intelligence on the overall package, it is proposed to continue delegating CRF funding to the City and Districts. This gives the City and District Councils flexibility to target CRF as makes most sense locally, within the requirements of the fund. The councils have been asked to provide an outline of their proposed activity before April.

Family Hub Programme
Due to the ending of the support for FSM eligible households in the school holidays, the Family Hub programme offers an alternative route to supporting low income families. The Cost of Living manager is working with internal and external stakeholders to the Family Hubs programme to agree funding priorities. This is expected to be a blend of crisis and resilience support.

Community larders
This allocation will support the SOFEA community larder network which comprises 26 larders within Oxfordshire. Funding will support the core larder offer, develop the range of products available and connect larders to resilience and other support services.

CABINET

21 APRIL 2026

COMMUNITY COHESION ACTION PLAN

Report by Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

   Note the progress being made by the Council to strengthen community cohesion across the county in response to the motion approved at Council on 9 December 2025.

Executive Summary

2. This paper sets out progress being made by the Council to strengthen community cohesion across the county amid growing challenges such as misinformation, declining institutional trust, cost-of-living pressures, social isolation, and localised tensions.

3. It provides contextual information, which identify the key evidence-based drivers of community cohesion, including shared identity, trust, strong community sectors, social mixing, inclusive engagement, and effective tension-reduction approaches

4. Specifically, it provides updates on:

   - the establishment of a new cross-party Members Advisory Group for community cohesion;
   - the first in a series of member engagement opportunities, reflecting the fact that community cohesion cuts across all councillor divisions and responsibilities;
   - a small-scale Listening Exchanges pilot led by researchers from the University of Oxford's Global Centre on Healthcare and Urbanisation.

Background

5. Community cohesion describes the conditions in which people from different backgrounds - across ethnicity, faith, age, gender, socio-economic status, migration history and more - feel a strong sense of belonging, mutual trust, and shared stake in their local area. Where cohesion is strong, communities are more resilient, safer and better able to weather crises without division.

6. Across UK evidence, it has been identified that the key threats to community cohesion cluster around:

- Information harms: misinformation, online extremism
- Institutional harms: falling trust, weak democratic norms
- Economic harms: cost-of-living stress, perceived competition
- Social harms: isolation, lack of mixing, prejudice
- Political harms: polarisation, harassment, extremist mobilisation
- Structural harms: lack of participation and early intervention
- Tension triggers: rumours, conflicts, unsafe or contested spaces

These factors interact: economic stress fuels mistrust, misinformation intensifies prejudice, and low contact makes communities more vulnerable to division.

7. Across the county, there is a broad spectrum of factors currently impacting community cohesion. These range from rising misinformation about migration and the visibility of flags or symbols that can become flashpoints, to pressures from the cost-of-living crisis, as well as differing opinions on topics such as low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) and the temporary congestion charge.

8. On 9 December 2025 Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers raised a motion on community cohesion at Council, which was rooted in her understanding of the impact of misinformation and intolerance on Oxfordshire communities. The motion was carried, with 49 votes in favour.

9. At the 10 February 2026 Council meeting, the responsibilities of Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Inequalities, were formally expanded to include community cohesion.

10. The Council's 2026/7 budget includes a Green Party amendment of one-off funding of £100,000 to support the development of a Community Cohesion Action Plan and activity arising from it.

11. On 27 January 2026 the government published new community cohesion guidance for local authorities called 'Common ground: Building cohesive communities'. This guidance was commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and developed by Belong – The Cohesion and Integration Network in partnership with the Local Government Association. It has been endorsed on a cross-party basis.

12. The guidance provides the first updated national framework in many years to help councils:

- Respond to community tensions, polarisation and division
- Embed community cohesion across all council services
- Tackle misinformation, hate crime and emerging threats
- Strengthen local resilience and a shared sense of belonging

13. The guidance covers the clear statutory footing for local authorities, a shared national framework, practical tools for councils and around 70 case studies

and good practice examples of evidence-based interventions that have worked locally from councils across England. The Council's lead officer for equalities has now completed the accompanying training to this guidance led by the Belong Network.

14. On 9 March 2026 the government launched its new cohesion action plan, "Protecting What Matters," with the aim of building stronger, more cohesive communities across the country. The plan sets out a comprehensive approach to addressing issues such as immigration, integration, tackling extremism, education, and local investment.

15. Overall, the government's strategy frames social cohesion as a national security issue and details the first government-wide plan to rebuild community bonds following years of declining trust. In summary, three pillars structure the response: i) confident communities, ii) cohesive communities, and iii) resilient communities, supported by a new Social Cohesion Taskforce. The government is adopting a non-statutory definition of anti-Muslim hostility for the first time and will appoint a Special Representative to oversee its implementation.

16. In the strategy, new powers are set out to strengthen the Charity Commission's ability to shut down charities found to be promoting extremism, with automatic trustee disqualification for certain hate crime convictions.

17. In addition, the strategy includes a further expansion of the Pride in Place programme – a long-term regeneration initiative designed to support some of the country's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods through sustained, community-led investment. Under the programme, Greater Leys – including Blackbird Leys – has been selected to receive up to £20 million over ten years, with funding focused on strengthening communities, improving local places and amenities, and empowering residents to shape priorities for their area through a neighbourhood board and local partnerships.

Strengthening community cohesion

18. Oxfordshire County Council is proud of its diverse communities and the many organisations that work tirelessly to support them. The Council recognises the importance of co-production and collaboration – from initiatives to ensure that services are accessible, to events that bring people together. The Council is proud to be recognised as the first county council to be awarded Local Authority of Sanctuary status. These efforts reflect the values of the Council and the resilience of its communities, even in the face of national challenges.

19. Under the stewardship of Cllr Gregory, who has assumed Cabinet responsibility for community cohesion, progress is being made to develop a community cohesion action plan in response to the motion raised at Council on 9 December 2025. The initial focus has been on engaging with county councillors, recognising that this work will, over time, extend to wider stakeholders and communities.

20. A cross-party Member Advisory Group on community cohesion has been established. Chaired by Cllr Gregory, the group provides a structured forum for members to share local insight, help shape the action plan, advise on engagement, and ensure that this work remains grounded in members' experience of their divisions.

21. All councillors have been invited to two workshops in late April / early May. The workshops will provide a confidential, politically neutral space to:

- develop a shared understanding of community cohesion
- share local intelligence from across the county, and
- help identify priority areas and opportunities to inform the action plan.

22. The outputs from these workshops will contribute to the evidence base that officers are reviewing to understand the factors affecting community cohesion in Oxfordshire and to inform the development of the community cohesion action plan. This includes economic hardship, safety and security concerns, online harms, and declining trust in politics and public institutions.

23. As work progresses to develop the community cohesion action plan, the Council recognises a collaborative, inclusive approach is required involving public services, communities and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector. At this early stage in its development officers are engaging with key partners, including Thames Valley Police, and will identify opportunities to support shared experiences, civic pride and locally led initiatives.

Community cohesion and existing policy programmes

24. Several existing and emerging policy programmes across the county council already contribute to this agenda. These workstreams provide a strong foundation for strengthening community cohesion, most are identified in the Strategic Plan 2025–2028 and include:

- Community wealth building
- New cost of living programme
- Marmot Place programme
- Oxfordshire Way
- Targeted activity within community insight profile areas, through the work of community health development officers and grants to enable local impact
- Community hubs and family hubs programmes.

Listening Exchanges

25. Council officers have been working with researchers at the University of Oxford's Global Centre on Healthcare and Urbanisation, who have developed an approach known as Listening Exchanges.

26. A Listening Exchange is a method that brings two people together who have different views on an issue and helps them hear each other's perspective. It is about understanding the view of a fellow citizen with whom one disagrees, without an intention to change their mind. It aims to build understanding between citizens, with a view to disagreeing better.

27. The Council has commissioned the team to run a small pilot programme in Oxfordshire to explore whether the method can reduce polarisation on contentious issues, even when opinions remain different. It will use the method between citizens who disagree with one another and with individuals of particular influence e.g. community leaders. There will be an evaluation of its effectiveness in building understanding and reducing polarisation.

28. Subject to the outcomes of the pilot and the availability of future funding, there may be opportunities to work with the University to extend this approach in two directions. First, community capacity-building, including training local community facilitators and supporting a longer-term community of practice for Listening Exchanges. Second, the development of a listening and mediation offer for Oxfordshire's youth organisations and schools, to help young people build skills for constructive listening and dialogue.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

29. Community cohesion is central to the Council's vision as set out in the Strategic Plan 2025–2028, to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county centred around strong and connected communities, healthy places to live, and a thriving local economy that benefits everyone.

Financial Implications

30. The Council's 2026/7 budget includes a Green Party amendment of one-off funding of £100,000 to support the development of a community cohesion action plan and activity arising from it. Where appropriate, Council officers will also look at applying for external grant funding for specific activity. The listening exchanges pilot is being funded from the existing service budget for consultation and engagement, which is sufficient to cover this activity.

Comments checked by:
Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner – Resources

Legal Implications

31. There are no direct legal implications arising from this update report. Where specific community cohesion activities are developed under the community cohesion action plan, any legal implications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Comments checked by:
Jay Akbar, Head of Legal & Governance

Staff Implications

32. There are no new or additional staff implications arising from this report.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

33. There are no direct equality implications arising from this update report. Equality and inclusion impacts are at the core of the Council's approach to community cohesion. Where specific community cohesion activities are developed under the community cohesion action plan, equalities and inclusion impacts will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Sustainability Implications

34. There are no specific sustainability implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

35. This is an update report only. Where specific community cohesion activities are developed under the community cohesion action plan, risk assessments will be considered or will already have been considered related to specific planned pieces of work.

Consultations

36. Consultation has not informed the development of this paper.

Report by: Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

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April 2026

CABINET

TUESDAY 21 APRIL 2026

Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Policies

Report by Director of Property and Assets

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

   a) Approve the Community Asset Transfer (Annex 1) and Community Leasing (Annex 2) Policies.

Executive Summary

2. Two policies have been developed regarding the leasing and transfer of council-owned property to voluntary and community organisations.

3. The Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy (Annex 1) replaces the 2019 version and distinguishes asset transfer from community leasing. It sets out the council's approach to transferring ownership of council assets to community organisations at below market value to achieve public benefit. It aims to empower local communities, ensure assets that are no longer needed by the council are used for social good.

4. The Community Leasing Policy (Annex 2) establishes a framework for leasing council-owned assets - such as buildings and land - to community organisations at below-best value to generate public benefit. Community leasing is only available to appropriately constituted community organisations and charities that can demonstrate clear social, economic or environmental benefits for local communities. The policy aims to maximise community value while safeguarding council interests and strategic objectives.

5. These policies establish the process by which community groups can apply for a CAT, the eligibility criteria of prospective groups and the assessment criteria used to assess applications.

6. These policies are on the forward plan for Performance and Corporate Services Scrutiny on 17 April 2026 and Cabinet for 21 April 2026.

Background Context – Definitions and National Policy

7. Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is defined by the Local Government Association as: 'transferring the ownership of land or buildings from a statutory

body to a Community Organisation at "less than best consideration" – that is at less than its full market value – in order to achieve a public benefit'

8. The Local Government Act 1972 s123 requires councils to obtain the "best consideration reasonably obtainable" when disposing of land or buildings.

9. However, the Local Government Act 1972 General Disposal Consent (England) 2003 disposal of land for less than the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained gives permission for councils to dispose at less than best consideration, provided that the undervalue is less than £2m (in capital terms), and the transfer benefits the economic, social, or environmental well-being of the area.

Community Asset Transfer at OCC

10. These policies replace the 2019 Community Asset Transfer Policy. Property and Assets officers have reported that this policy is now rarely used, having not received any applications for a new CAT since the Covid pandemic.

11. Property and Assets officers have also identified that the Council currently has very few empty properties in its portfolio. It is worth noting that with Local Government Reorganisation on the horizon, the properties and assets portfolio may change significantly which could open more opportunities.

12. The 2024 Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) report "Embedding Community Wealth Building into Oxfordshire County Council" identifies this policy as being 'under-utilised' and identifies a knowledge gap on the topic of community asset transfer from within the council.[1]

13. The April 2025 report "Oxfordshire: a County of Community Wealth Building" produced between the Council and local experts identified improving access to land and property for community groups as one of its calls to action, recommending that the council review and improve its CAT policy.[2]

14. The Performance and Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, when scrutinising the Social Value Policy (24 February 2026), identified that the Council could be doing more to identify and promote opportunities for CAT. It also pointed out that with the incoming changes to the Council through Local Government Reorganisation and Fairer Funding Review, and due to policy initiatives such as Marmot and children's centres grant funding, the Council should review how CAT could be used to meet these changing requirements.[3]

[1] [Report Title] p22
[2] Community wealth building report DRAFT 1 p9
[3] aebhdfh

15. These new policies were developed after internal stakeholder workshops featuring representation of officers from Property and Assets, Economy and Place, Policy, Procurement and Legal.

Proposal: Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Policies

16. In order to clarify and simplify, the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy (Annex 1) has been differentiated from Community Leasing (Annex 2). CAT will deal solely with the **transfer of ownership** of properties, whereas Community Leasing Policy (Annex 2) deals with the **leasing** of Council land or buildings at less than best consideration in order to achieve a public benefit.

17. These policies seek to recognise and maximise the benefits of the devolution of assets to local communities. They recognise supporting community groups in their work across Oxfordshire generates social value for residents and can alleviate cost and stress on Council statutory services.

Eligibility Criteria

18. CAT and Community Leasing are designed to support local organisations that provide a clear local public benefit. After consulting Council stakeholders and engaging VCS groups, it was decided that applicants would need to be one of:
    - constituted voluntary or community organisation
    - constituted group or club
    - registered charity
    - charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)
    - community interest company (CIC)
    - community benefit society (CBS)

19. The CAT and Community Leasing policies are intended to be used by local groups that need the Council's support the most. Therefore, for Community Leasing a yearly revenue cap of £2,500,000 for eligible groups has been implemented. By setting a revenue threshold, the Council ensures that Community Leasing will benefit those organisations most in need of financial support rather than larger, more well-resourced organisations.

Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Working Group

20. It is proposed that a Working Group is created. This group will have two main functions: assessing applications and identifying a pipeline of possible properties for CAT and Community Leasing.

21. The Working Group is designed to take a 'full council' approach and reflect the various objectives of the Council. The membership of the Working Group will be as follows:

(a) Property and Assets officer (nominated by the Director of Property and Assets)
(b) Economy and Place officer (nominated by the Director of Economy and Place with a focus on representing community wealth building and place shaping work)
(c) Officers from service areas with asset-based programmes or projects (for example, Family Hubs or Community Hubs). These officers will sit on the Working Group for the duration of their programme and will help ensure close co-working and information sharing.
(d) When assessing applications, the Working Group will call in an officer relevant to the service area which a CAT or Community Leasing application relates to. This is to ensure that the Working Group is making informed decisions about applications.

22. When an application comes in, the Working Group will call in an officer who has knowledge of the service which the application relates to (if not already present in the Working Group). This is with the aim of ensuring that the contextual and technical knowledge to assess applications is present.

23. Following consideration of each proposal, the Working Group will make a formal recommendation to the Director of Property and Assets, who holds delegated authority under the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers to take decisions relating to the management, leasing, and disposal of Council property and assets.

24. The Director of Property and Assets will act as the final decision-maker, applying the Council's principles of decision-making and ensuring compliance with all relevant financial, legal and constitutional requirements. Where a proposal constitutes a Key Decision, it will be escalated in accordance with the Constitution.

The Assessment Criteria

25. It is important to note that as the context around each property is different, each application will be judged on a case-by-case basis. Factors such as the location, commercial value and possible Council needs will be taken into account.

26. In order to assess how strong an application is, or to choose between more than one application, assessment criteria have been developed to measure the value of proposed CATs or Community Leases to the Council. The factors taken into account are:

(a) The social value created by the proposal. This could be exemplified by how the application supports the Council's Social Value Local Priorities, as set out in the Social Value Policy 2026, or by supporting one of the Marmot Place objectives. The proposal can support one or more of these, but it does not have to support all. There is no hierarchy of which priority or objective is preferred.
(b) The proposed use of the property supports Council statutory services.
(c) If the application proposes to invest into the property.

(d) The applicants can evidence sound financial management.
(e) The proposal provides a benefit for local residents and is supported by its community.

27. The level of rent for a Community Lease will be determined by the Council on a case-by-case basis, reflecting the specific circumstances of the asset and the proposal. As each asset and application presents many distinct factors to be taken into account, it is not possible to prescribe fixed criteria to determine rent levels. In determining the level of rent, the Council will consider factors such as the current condition, market value and demand for the property, including whether it has remained vacant for an extended period, the level of investment the applicant proposes to make in the property, and how well the application meets the assessment criteria.

Long Term Reporting and Commitments

28. For Community Asset Transfers, the Council will have first refusal of properties should the VCS organisation choose to move on, ensuring that the property is being used for something that is generating a public benefit. However, beyond this a CAT is a transfer of ownership, and as such yearly reporting will not be required.

29. With Community Leasing, successful applicants will need to provide yearly evidence that the property is being used for its agreed use and that it is providing a public benefit. The intention is to ensure social value is being provided but not to create extra work for community tenants, so submitting a charity commission report, impact report of equivalent will suffice. These will be agreed on a case-by-case basis.

30. In general, Community Leasing tenants will be responsible for general 'wear and tear' maintenance costs. The level of repair and maintenance will be agreed with Community Leasing tenants at the point of application to reflect the individual circumstances of the property and the contract agreed. For example, applicants who propose to invest more into a property may be recognised via a larger rent concession.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

31. These policies support the Council's Strategic Plan 2025-28 objectives of working for a Greener, Fairer and Healthier Oxfordshire. They do this by empowering local community groups by supporting them to access property throughout the county.

32. Marmot Place - Oxfordshire is a Marmot Place - CAT and Community Leasing contribute towards this by empowering local communities to generate social benefits in their local spaces.

33. Property and Assets Strategy 2022 - Any CAT or Community Leasing decisions need to fit within the County Council's 2022 Property and Assets Strategy. This strategy sets out the ten-year ambition for the County Council's property

portfolio to create an efficient, innovative and accessible property estate which delivers climate action objectives and generates social value for residents.

Financial Implications

34. The terms of the proposal have been assessed to be compliant with the best value requirements as set out in section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson - Finance Business Partner (Resources & E&P)
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Legal Implications

35. Because of Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, unlike private and commercial landowners, who are free to buy, sell or lease land at whatever price they choose, a local authority cannot dispose of its land for a consideration less than the best that can be reasonably obtained in the market, except with the express consent of the Secretary of State.

36. Section 123 does not apply however to short leases of under 7 years.

37. The Secretary of State has given express consent for "undervalue" disposals that local authorities consider will secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of their areas, providing that the "undervalue" is not more than £2m (see the General Disposal Consent referred to above).

38. In practice:
    (a) Although Section 123 does not apply to short leases of under 7 years, the Council remains under a duty to maximise its revenues and so the same caution should be applied to granting such leases at an "undervalue" as those of over 7 years.
    (b) "Subsidy Control" legislation is not overridden by the above and the Council needs to ensure that by transacting at an undervalue it is not creating an unfair subsidy (e.g. providing premises cheaply to a charity providing paid counselling services which is competing with a private sector organisation supplying similar services).
    (c) The Council is always at risk of judicial review in the exercise of its discretions, so needs to keep a clear record of its assessment processes and criteria and for those making decisions to have a clear understanding in each case as to the extent of the "undervalue" involved (by noting the difference between the proposed consideration and the potentially achievable consideration).
    (d) The Council needs to be aware that unrelated legislation restricts it from disposing of certain types of land it owns (eg the School Standard and Framework Act 1998 in respect of school playing fields) and that

legislation still needs to be fully complied with before any disposal takes place.

(e) Those administering the policies need to be aware that freehold transfers are fundamentally different to leases – leases are finite in length and enable the Council (as landlord) directly to manage what is done in a property and terminate them should the tenant not do what is expected. Freehold transfers involve the Council giving up ownership and control forever (although certain limited steps can be taken to try and retain control).

Richard Hodby, Solicitor (Law and Governance)
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Staff Implications

39. These policies are procedural and do not require any new or additional staffing resources. The only changes they may make would be possible extra responsibilities for officers sitting on the working group.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

40. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for these policies (Annex 3). This assessment does not identify negative impacts. Outcomes will be dependent on which VCS groups apply for a CAT or Community Lease.

Sustainability Implications

41. A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed for these policies (Annex 4). This assessment identifies a positive impact.

Risk Management

42. Key risks and mitigations include:

(a) Implementation risk – These policies might be implemented inconsistently. Mitigation – all CAT or Community Leasing applications will be assessed via the same assessment criteria. The Working Group, which will assess applications, will feature officers from service area relevant to the application to ensure the requisite knowledge to assess them is present.

(b) Financial risk – Community Leases or CATs pose a reduction of possible Council rent receipts or capital receipts. Mitigation – Property and Assets officers have to put properties onto a list for them to be eligible. Final sign off also sits with the Director for Property and Assets to ensure that all final decisions are compliant with the Property and Assets strategy. Successful

applicants also have to provide in their application proof of their business plan to safeguard the proposed use of the property.

(c) Risk of improper use of Community Leasing properties –Community Leasing tenants might change their use of the property, meaning that the public benefit / social benefit that the rent reduction was granted to recognise is no longer being generated. Mitigation – Community Leasing tenants are required to provide their charity commission report, impact report or equivalent document in order to demonstrate that through their use of the property a public benefit is being provided for the local community.

(d) Improper use of a Community Asset Transfer – a successful CAT applicant might look to sell the property that they were devolved via a CAT for a private profit. This would mean that the property has left the public estate, and there is no local benefit being provided through it. Mitigation – clauses will be implemented in CAT contracts that give the Council first refusal for the property.

43. These policies address the current risk of rent reductions being administered in a non-uniform manner.

44. It should also be noted that these policies only introduce the mechanism by which CATs or Community Leases can take place. Before each individual CAT or Community Lease that the council enters into, the proper and sufficient due diligence will be undertaken.

Consultations

45. Development of the policy was informed by internal workshops with colleagues from Property and Assets, Policy, Commercial and Procurement, Legal, and Economy and Place.

46. A VCS engagement period was undertaken from 08/02/2026 – 09/03/2026 through a Let's Talk Oxfordshire survey. This survey was shared with VCS organisations through our VCS infrastructure partners Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) and with Community First Oxfordshire (CFO).

47. A webinar was run on 05/03/2026 which VCS organisations could join to give feedback and ask questions. This was attended by senior Property and Assets colleagues. This webinar was also advertised through OCVA and CFO's channels.

48. Feedback and changes made included:

(a) Expanding upon the Assessment Criteria to include specific objectives that included children 0-5. Marmot Place principles were included to reflect this, and clarification was added that applications do not have to support more than one priority.

(b) Clarifying that the Council is open to long-term leases (such as 10 or 20 years), which are beneficial to VCS organisations as they can enable them to access extra funding.

(c) Clarifying that ad-hoc hiring out of properties is permitted but clarifying that subletting requires formal consent first.
(d) Being flexible around how Community Leasing tenants can provide reporting on their use of the property to avoid creating superfluous work for them.

VIC KURZEJA
Director of Property and Assets

Annex:	Annex 1: Community Asset Transfer Policy 2026 Annex 2: Community Leasing Policy 2026 Annex 3: Equalities Impact Assessment Annex 4: Climate Impact Assessment
Background papers:	Embedding Community Wealth Building into Oxfordshire County Council, *Centre for Local Economic Studies* - [Report Title] Oxfordshire: a County of Community Wealth Building - Community wealth building report DRAFT 1
Contact Officer:	James Cater, National Management Trainee, james.cater@oxfordshire.gov.uk

April 2026

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COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER POLICY 2026

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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1.0 Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council ("the Council") Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy seeks to recognise and maximise the benefits of the devolution of assets to local communities.

The Local Government Association defines a CAT as: '*transferring the ownership of land or buildings from a statutory body to a Community Organisation at "less than best consideration" – that is at less than its full market value – in order to achieve a public benefit*'.

This policy sets out OCC's approach to CAT. It outlines the principles behind community asset transfers together with details of who is eligible to apply, what support will be provided to assist organisations seeking to take a transfer and how proposals will be assessed. It also sets a clear process for CAT applications.

An asset is defined as a building and/or land owned by the Council.

CAT differs from Community Leasing as CAT deals with **transfer of ownership** of assets for less than best consideration. Community Leasing refers to the **leasing** of assets to community groups for less than best consideration. See the Community Leasing Policy 2026 for more information on community leasing.

This policy replaces the Community Asset Transfer Policy 2019. It does this by differentiating between Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing and further clarifies the application process.

1.1 The National Policy Context

When making decisions with regard to our asset portfolio, the Council needs to be mindful of the following legislation:

- **The Local Government Act 1973** s123 requires councils to obtain the "best consideration reasonably obtainable" when disposing of land or buildings.
- **General Disposal Consent (England) 2003** gives permission for Councils to dispose at less than best consideration, provided that the undervalue is less than £2m (in capital terms), **and** the transfer benefits the economic, social, or environmental well-being of the area.

1.2 CAT in the Oxfordshire County Council Policy Landscape

Strategic Plan 2025-2028

One of the three core pillars for the 2025-28 Strategic Plan is 'Fairer', ensuring that the local economy benefits everyone, our services are as easy to access as possible and that we help communities in need. CAT enables more community groups to have access to local facilities and thrive in our county.

Property and Assets Strategy 2022

Any CAT decisions need to fit within the Council's 2022 Property and Assets Strategy. This strategy sets out the ten-year ambition for the Council's property portfolio to create an efficient, innovative and accessible property estate which delivers climate action objectives and generates social value for residents.

Marmot Place

Oxfordshire is a Marmot Place - a programme of work across public sector partners, businesses and voluntary sector organisations which aim to tackle health inequalities and improve health fairness in Oxfordshire. CAT contributes towards this by empowering local communities to generate social benefits in their local spaces.

Delivering the Future Together

As part of the Delivering the Future Together agenda, the Council is committing to becoming a place shaper and partner of choice. This means working proactively with our voluntary sector to help them thrive throughout the county.

1.3 When will a property or asset be applicable for Community Asset Transfer?

The Council has a large and varied property and assets portfolio, with most of the estate used for corporate purposes, let, or held for redevelopment or sale.

When an asset is identified as being surplus to the Council's requirements, consideration will be given as to whether there is an alternative requirement internally or if the asset is required in the longer term. Not all assets are deemed suitable for asset transfer and there are some that will be reserved for the commercial disposal route, generating a capital receipt for the Council. Assets which have the potential to generate significant capital receipts are less likely to be considered as suitable for a CAT.

In general, assets will be made available for transfer unless one of the following principles applies:

a. Property revenue savings or capital receipts from the property are essential to contribute to Council savings.
b. There is another Council need for the property which would be financially disadvantageous to meet in any other way.
c. The asset is leased by the Council.
d. The property has already been identified for utilisation under One Public Estate.
e. Grant conditions for capital expenditure on the property prevent the property being transferred or prevent a change of use within a specified timescale.
f. The proposed use and terms of the transfer would result in a liability upon the Council to repay grant monies.
g. The condition of the asset is not deemed fit for purpose or does not meet the current Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards without capital investment.
h. The proposed use is not compatible with the existing or intended use of adjacent Council retained land/buildings.

1.4 Eligibility

You can apply if your organisation has a significant social or environmental benefit to residents of Oxfordshire. You are eligible to apply if you are a:

- constituted voluntary or community organisation
- constituted group or club
- registered charity
- charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)
- community interest company (CIC)
- community benefit society (CBS)

See section 3.1 for the Assessment Criteria by which applications will be judged

2.0 Principles of CAT

1. **Transparent**
   - We will be open about the properties that we have available. They will be advertised on the Council website at: Council land and buildings | Oxfordshire County Council. The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will review this list quarterly, and update it whenever appropriate properties are identified.
   - We will be open and clear about the application progress, as well as the timescale of the process, and will respond to all applications as quickly as possible.
   - We will be open about the criteria which we judge applications against. (See section 3.1)
2. **Fair**
   - We will be open to applications from all eligible groups.
   - We will judge all applications against our assessment criteria (see section 3.1)
3. **Accountable**
   - All final decisions regarding a CAT will be made through the CAT / Community Leasing Working Group, taking into account the needs from across the Council.
   - Any accepted CAT will be financially sustainable and not incur ongoing costs for the Council.
   - We will ask that all applications demonstrate a sound business plan that shows how community partners will be able to care for the asset.

2.1 CAT / Community Leasing Working Group

To enable full oversight for opportunities for CAT and to enable a cross-Council view, a CAT and Community Leasing Working Group will be established. Membership of the Working Group will be comprised of:

- Properties and Assets officer. Nominated by the Director of Properties and Assets. This officer will chair the Working Group.

- Economy and Place officer. Nominated by the Director of Economy and Place. This officer will represent the Council's place shaping and community wealth building objectives.
- Asset-based programmes. An officer from relevant service areas with asset-based programmes or projects (such as Family Hubs or Community Hubs) will be invited to sit on the Working Group for the duration of the programme.
- Relevant service area. Where necessary, the Working Group will call in an officer relevant to the service area which a CAT or CL application relates to. This is to ensure that the Working Group is making informed decisions about the possible benefits of applications.

The Working Group's first function will be to identify properties suitable for CAT / Community Leasing, and to maintain and update the published list of available properties. The Working Group will meet quarterly to review this list. It will keep a record of any requests that VCS groups have made for properties to be added to the list, which will feed into decision making.

The Working Group's second function will be to assess applications, using the Assessment Criteria set out in Section 3.1. A multi-Service approach will be taken, so that services relevant to the VCS group applying are present to help assess the application.

Following consideration of each proposal, the Working Group will make a formal recommendation to the Director of Property and Assets, who holds delegated authority under the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers to take decisions relating to the management, leasing, and disposal of Council property and assets.

The Director of Property and Assets will act as the final decision-maker, applying the Council's principles of decision-making and ensuring compliance with all relevant financial, legal and constitutional requirements. Where a proposal constitutes a Key Decision, it will be escalated in accordance with the Constitution.

3.0 The Application Process

1.) A list of available properties will be published online at: Council land and buildings | Oxfordshire County Council. If you have any questions regarding any of these properties, please contact: Estates.Enquiries@Oxfordshire.gov.uk. Members will be informed of any properties in their wards that have been designated for Community Asset Transfer.
2.) If you would like to apply for a CAT, you will need to fill in a Full Application form (See Annex 1). This form goes into detail about your intended use for the asset, as well as your business plan. Please ensure that you have read the full CAT policy – in particular ensure that your organisation is eligible (1.4 Eligibility) and refer to Section 3.1 Assessment Criteria for how your Full Application will be judged.
3.) The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will evaluate your application against the assessment criteria and arrive at a recommendation that will be

put forward for decision. Members will be informed of any applications made for properties within their wards.

4.) The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will inform you in writing of the decision.

Only applications for properties published online as available for CAT or Community Leasing will be considered. However, organisations are encouraged to indicate interest in a Council owned property for future CAT or Community Leasing by emailing Estates.Enquiries@Oxfordshire.gov.uk. A log will be maintained of all notices of interest, which will be used to inform future decision making.

It is the responsibility of the CAT / Community Leasing Working Group to respond to each stage of the application process in a timely manner, and to communicate each stage with the applicant.

Preparing the information and documents required for the application form can be a lengthy and time-consuming process. Once the Full Application has been submitted, the Council will aim to get Heads of Terms (a non-binding summary of key terms agreed before drafting a full housing contract) agreed and solicitors instructed as soon as possible.

3.1 Assessment Criteria

The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will consider each Business Proposal made against the following criteria:

a) The proposed use for the asset will generate significant social value for the county. This could be through supporting:
   - The Council's Social Value Local Priorities, as established in the Social Value Policy. These can be found here: Social Value Policy | Oxfordshire County Council
   - The Council's Marmot Place objectives. These can be found here: Oxfordshire as a Marmot Place | Oxfordshire County Council
   - Please note, applications do not need to support multiple priorities, and there is no hierarchy of which priorities are preferable.

b) The proposal supports the Council to deliver its statutory services or makes a cost saving for the Council by supporting a statutory service.

c) The application proposes to invest into the repair or improvement of the property.

d) They have a viable business plan that covers the costs of holding the property and managing it effectively OR an evidenced track record of good financial management.

e) There is evidence of community need and support for the proposal

f) The proposal will be focused on providing a clear long-term benefit to the local community, rather than a national focus.

g) The proposal comes from an appropriately constituted organisation (see section 1.4)

Particular weight will be given to applications that support the Council's priorities. Service areas will be consulted on applications that are related directly to their services in order to assess the level of potential impact.

3.2 Long-term considerations

First refusal

CAT contracts will also contain provisions which ensure that the Council have first refusal should the successful CAT applicant choose to move on from the property. These will be at the same value of the asset as originally set out in the originally CAT – i.e., if a property is transferred at peppercorn rate, it will be returned as such. This is to guarantee that the long-term value and use of this asset is retained by the public.

Appendix 1: Full Application

Community Asset Transfer Full Application

1. The Asset

Name of Asset	
Address of Asset	

2. Details of the organisation making the application

Name of Organisation	
Address of Organisation	
Telephone number	
Email address	

3. Contact Details

Your name	
Contact address	
Telephone number	
Email address	
Position in the Organisation	

4. Organisation Structure

What kind of organisation are you?
E.g., Registered charity, Community Interest Company etc. See Section 1.4 Eligibility.

Charity / Company number:

5. Governance

When was your organisation established?

Does your organisation have a written constitution, governing document, or set of rules? Yes No
If yes, please attach to this document

How many people are involved in your organisation in the following positions?

Management committee		Paid full time staff	
Paid part time staff		Volunteers	

Please tell us the type of insurance your organisation holds and provide the levels of cover.
E.g., Public Liability, Employer Liability, Professional Indemnity

6. Terms of Request

What price are you prepared to pay for the asset requested?

Proposed price: £

Please attach a note setting out any other terms and conditions you wish to apply to the request

7. Business Plan

For the following section, refer to Section 3.1 to read the Assessment Criteria which will be used to judge your application.

7.1 Use - Set out how you plan to use the asset. Explain the objectives of your project, why there is a need for it, and any activities that will take place there. Please also include your budget for the first year of the lease.

Please note that all applicants will be required to meet statutory consents (the legally required approvals that must be obtained before the CAT can take place, such as planning permission, building regulations, listed building consent or licensing).

(500 words max)

7.2 Funding

Lay out how you intend to fund the running of the property, as well as any repairs / development.

Established groups will need to provide accounts that demonstrate three years of good financial management.

For new groups, please provide an outline of how you propose to fund the rent you are prepared to pay for the land, as well as how you are going to hold the property and manage it effectively. You should show your calculations of the costs associated with the transfer of the land or building and your future use of it, including any redevelopment, ongoing maintenance and the costs of your activities. *

**Please note that Council grant funding cannot be used to fund rent or planned investment or repairs.*

(250 words max)

7.3 Investment / Development

Please set out any investment, development or changes you plan to make to the land or building. (250 words)

7.4 Social Value – Please set out the social value that will be generated should your application be approved. Consider how your proposal might generate social, economic or environmental benefits for the local community. Consider how your proposal will support either the Council's Social Value Local Priorities (found in the Social Value Policy) or Marmot Place objectives. If applicable, also detail how your proposal would support the Council to deliver any of its statutory services.

Please note that applications do not need to support multiple priorities, and there is no hierarchy of which priorities are preferable.

(500 words max)

7.5 Negative consequences – What negative consequences (if any) may occur if your request is agreed to? How would you propose to minimise these? You should consider any potential negative consequences for the local economy, environment, or any group of people, and explain how you could reduce these. (250 words)

7.6 Level and Nature of Support - Please provide details of the level and nature of support for the request, from your community and, if relevant, from others. This could include information on the proportion of your community who are involved with the request, how you have engaged with your community beyond the members of your organisation and what their response has been. (250 words max)

8. Equalities and Inclusion

How will you ensure that your services / activities are accessible for everyone in your community? (250 words max)

Completed application should be emailed to: Estates.Enquiries@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

COMMUNITY LEASING POLICY 2026

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

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1.0 Introduction

Community Leasing is the leasing of an asset from Oxfordshire County Council ('the Council') at "less than best consideration" – that is less than its full market value – in order to achieve a public benefit. This public benefit can come through the value generated from social, environmental or economic programmes for local communities.

An asset is defined as a building(s) and/or land owned by the Council.

How does it differ from traditional leasing?
Firstly, Community Leasing is only possible for community groups and charities (see "Eligibility" for more details) – for-profit entities are not able to access Community Leases. Secondly, Community Leases are only possible for groups that are able to demonstrate a clear social benefit that they are providing, which allows the Council to justify forgoing "best consideration" – full market value.

How does it differ from Community Asset Transfer?
Community Asset Transfer (CAT) deals with **transfer of ownership** of assets for less than best consideration. Community Leasing refers to the **leasing** of assets to community groups for less than best consideration.

Please refer to the Community Asset Transfer Policy 2026 for more on CATs.

1.1 The National Policy Context

When making decisions with regard to our asset portfolio, the Council needs to be mindful of the following legislation:

- **The Local Government Act 1973** s123 requires councils to obtain the "best consideration reasonably obtainable" when disposing of land or buildings.
- **General Disposal Consent (England) 2003** gives permission for councils to dispose at less than best consideration, provided that the undervalue is less than £2m (in capital terms), and the transfer benefits the economic, social, or environmental well-being of the area.

1.2 Community Leasing in the Oxfordshire County Council Policy Landscape

Strategic Plan 2025-2028

One of the three core pillars for the 2025-28 Strategic Plan is 'Fairer', ensuring that the local economy benefits everyone, our services are as easy to access as possible and that we help communities in need. Community Leasing enables more community groups to have access to local facilities and thrive in our county.

Property and Assets Strategy 2022

Any Community Leasing decisions need to fit within the Council's 2022 Property and Assets Strategy. This strategy sets out the ten-year ambition for the Council's property portfolio to create an efficient, innovative and accessible property estate which delivers climate action objectives and generates social value for residents.

Marmot Place
Oxfordshire is a Marmot Place - a programme of work across public sector partners, businesses and voluntary sector organisations which aim to tackle health inequalities and improve health fairness in Oxfordshire. Community Leasing contributes towards this by empowering local communities to generate social benefits in their local spaces.

Delivering the Future Together
As part of the Delivering the Future Together agenda, the Council is committing to becoming a place shaper and partner of choice. This means working proactively with our voluntary sector to help them thrive throughout the county.

1.3 When will we do Community Leasing?

The Council has a large and varied portfolio of property and land, with most of the estate used for corporate purposes, let, or held for redevelopment or sale.

When a Council-owned building or land (an asset) is identified as being surplus to the Council's requirement, consideration will be given to whether there is an alternative requirement internally or if the asset is required in the longer term. Not all assets are deemed suitable for Community Leasing and there are some that will be reserved for the commercial disposal route, generating revenue or a capital receipt for the council. Assets which have the potential to generate significant capital receipts are less likely to be considered as suitable for Community Leasing.

Community Leasing is preferred when an asset has been identified as important to the long-term future of the Council, but in the short-term is not needed. It is therefore in the public interest to retain it as part of the Council asset portfolio, whilst enabling a community group to maximise its use in the meantime.

In general, assets will be made available for Community Leasing unless one of the following principles applies:

a) Property revenue savings or capital receipts from the property are essential to contribute to Council savings.
b) There is another Council need for the property which would be financially disadvantageous to meet in any other way.
c) The asset is leased in by the Council.
d) The property has already been identified for utilisation under One Public Estate.
e) Grant conditions for capital expenditure on the property prevent the property being leased or prevent a change of use within a specified timescale.
f) The proposed use and terms of the lease would result in a liability upon the Council to repay grant monies.
g) The condition of the asset is not deemed fit for purpose or does not meet the current Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards without capital investment.
h) The proposed use is not compatible with the existing or intended use of adjacent Council retained land/buildings.

i) If engaging in Community Leasing would cause the Council to incur significant future costs that would be needed for the building to be operational – e.g., roof repairs or central heating.

1.4 Eligibility

You can apply if your organisation has a significant social or environmental benefit to residents of Oxfordshire. You are eligible to apply if you are a:

- constituted voluntary or community organisation
- constituted group or club
- registered charity
- charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)
- community interest company (CIC)
- community benefit society (CBS)

Community Leases are intended to support the VCS groups that need it the most to access property within the county. Therefore, organisations that have a yearly revenue of over £2,500,000 will not be considered eligible. By setting a revenue threshold, the Council ensures that Community Leasing benefits those organisations most in need of financial support rather than well-resourced, larger organisations.

See section 3.1 for the Assessment Criteria by which applications will be judged.

2.0 Principles of Community Leasing

To ensure that maximum value is obtained from Community Leases, for both the Council and the community sector, our approach to Community Leasing will be shaped by the following principles:

1. **Transparent**
   - We will be open about the properties that we have available. They will be advertised on the Council website at: Council land and buildings | Oxfordshire County Council. The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will review this list quarterly, and update it whenever appropriate properties are identified.
   - We will be open and clear about the application progress, as well as the timescale of the process, and will respond to all applications as quickly as possible.
   - We will be open about the criteria which we judge applications against. (See section 3.1)
2. **Fair**
   - We will be open to applications from all eligible groups.
   - We will judge all applications against our assessment criteria (see section 3.1)
3. **Accountable**
   - The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will assess all applications and represent the needs from across the Council.
   - Any accepted community lease will be financially sustainable and not incur ongoing costs for the Council.

- We will ask that all applications demonstrate a sound business plan that shows how community partners will be able to care for the asset.

2.1 CAT / Community Leasing Working Group

To enable full oversight of opportunities for CAT and to enable a cross-Council view, a CAT and Community Leasing Working Group will be established. Membership of the Working Group will be comprised of:

- Properties and Assets officer. Nominated by the Director of Properties and Assets. This officer will chair the Working Group.
- Economy and Place officer. Nominated by the Director of Economy and Place. This officer will represent the Council's place shaping and community wealth building objectives.
- Asset-based programmes. An officer from relevant service areas with asset-based programmes or projects (such as Family Hubs or Community Hubs) will be invited to sit on the Working Group for the duration of the programme.
- Relevant service area. Where necessary, the Working Group will call in an officer relevant to the service area which a CAT or CL application relates to. This is to ensure that the Working Group is making informed decisions about the possible benefits of applications.

The Working Group's first function will be to identify properties suitable for CAT / Community Leasing, and to maintain and update the published list of available properties. The Working Group will meet quarterly to review this list. It will keep a record of any requests that VCS groups have made for properties to be added to the list, which will feed into decision making.

The Working Group's second function will be to assess applications, using the Assessment Criteria set out in Section 3.1. A multi-Service approach will be taken, so that services relevant to the VCS group applying are present to help assess the application.

Following consideration of each proposal, the Working Group will make a formal recommendation to the Director of Property and Assets, who holds delegated authority under the Council's Scheme of Delegation to Officers to take decisions relating to the management, leasing, and disposal of Council property and assets.

The Director of Property and Assets will act as the final decision-maker, applying the Council's principles of decision-making and ensuring compliance with all relevant financial, legal and constitutional requirements. Where a proposal constitutes a Key Decision, it will be escalated in accordance with the Constitution.

3.0 The Application Process

1.) A list of available properties will be published online at: Council land and buildings | Oxfordshire County Council. If you have any questions regarding

any of these properties, please contact: Estates.Enquiries@Oxfordshire.gov.uk . Members will be informed of any properties in their wards that have been designated for Community Leasing.

2.) If you would like to apply for a Community Lease, you will need to fill in a Full Application form (See Annex 1). This form goes into detail about your intended use for the asset, as well as your business plan. Please ensure that you have read the full Community Leasing policy – in particular ensure that your organisation is eligible (1.4 Eligibility) and refer to Section 3.1 Assessment Criteria for how your Full Application will be judged.
3.) The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will evaluate your application against the assessment criteria and arrive at a recommendation that will be put forward for decision.
4.) The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will inform you in writing of the decision.

Only applications for properties published online as available for CAT or Community Leasing will be considered. However, organisations are encouraged to indicate interest in a Council owned property for future CAT or Community Leasing by emailing Estates.Enquiries@Oxfordshire.gov.uk. A log will be maintained of all notices of interest, which will be used to inform future decision making.

It is the responsibility of the CAT / Community Leasing Working Group to respond to each stage of the application process in a timely manner, and to communicate each stage with the applicant.

Preparing the information and documents required for the application form can be a lengthy and time-consuming process. Once the Full Application has been submitted, the Council will aim to get Heads of Terms (a non-binding summary of key terms agreed before drafting a full housing contract) agreed and solicitors instructed as soon as possible.

3.1 Assessment Criteria

The CAT / Community Leasing Working Group will consider each Business Proposal made against the following criteria:

a) The proposed use for the asset will generate significant social value for the county. This could be through supporting:
   - The Council's Social Value Local Priorities, as established in the Social Value Policy. These can be found here: Social Value Policy | Oxfordshire County Council
   - The Council's Marmot Place objectives. These can be found here: Oxfordshire as a Marmot Place | Oxfordshire County Council
   - Please note, applications do not need to support multiple priorities, and there is no hierarchy of which priorities are preferable.
b) The proposal supports the Council to deliver its statutory services or makes a cost saving for the Council by supporting a statutory service.
c) The application proposes to invest into the repair or improvement of the property.

d) They have a viable business plan that covers the costs of holding the property and managing it effectively OR an evidenced track record of good financial management.
e) There is evidence of community need and support for the proposal
f) The proposal will be focused on providing a clear long-term benefit to the local community, rather than a national focus.
g) The proposal comes from an appropriately constituted organisation (see section 1.4)

Particular weight will be given to applications that support the Council's priorities. Service areas will be consulted on applications that are related directly to their services in order to assess the level of potential impact.

3.2 Contract Types

General Terms

Leases will be considered on a case-by-case basis according to each asset's location and circumstances. For example, a property that is currently empty is far more likely to be considered for Community Leasing. The state of repair of the asset, and therefore its future associated costs, will also be considered.

In order to protect the long-term use of properties which have been identified as applicable for Community Leasing, some general terms will apply to any agreements:

- Contracts will be for a minimum of three (3) years, with a standard lease being seven (7) years. Leases will contain a break clause as standard.
- The Council recognises that long leases can be beneficial for VCS groups to attract grant funding. The Council is open to long term Community Leases (e.g., 10 or 20 years), as long as they comply with Council service requirements and the factors set out in section 1.3.
- Tenants will be given a "photographic schedule of condition" noting the condition of the building at the beginning of the lease.
- Contracts will be non-assignable, meaning contracts cannot be transferred to another party. Community Leases are only granted due to the public benefits provided by the application of community groups, so they cannot be passed on to different parties that have not been through this application process.
- Ad-hoc hiring out of the property is permitted, but no subletting will be permitted without formal consent. Part subletting to support the agreed use of the property will generally be agreed, provided the property is still being used to provide the public benefit as set out in the applicant's business plan.
- There will be no security of tenure. Community Leasing contracts are granted when the Council need to retain ownership of an asset in the long run but have identified that in the short run it could be better utilised by a community group. When contracts come to an end, it is likely because the Council requires the asset again, meaning we cannot grant the right for tenants to always renew contracts.
- In general, Community Leasing tenants will be responsible for general 'wear and tear' maintenance costs. The level of repair and maintenance will be agreed with Community Leasing tenants at the point of application to reflect

the individual circumstances of the property and the contract agreed. For example, applicants who propose to invest more into a property may be recognised via a larger rent concession.

How is the rent reduction calculated?

The level of rent for a Community Lease will be determined by the Council on a case-by-case basis, reflecting the specific circumstances of the asset and the proposal. As each asset and application presents many distinct factors to be taken into account, it is not possible to prescribe fixed criteria to determine rent levels. In determining the level of rent, the Council will consider factors such as:

- The current condition, market value and demand for the property, including whether it has remained vacant for an extended period.
- The level of investment the applicant proposes to make in the property. For example, if an application committed to investing into the property, it would be more likely to be recognised with a heavily reduced or peppercorn rent.
- The extent to which the proposal supports the Council's strategic objectives, benefits statutory services and delivers social value.

3.3 Long term considerations

Reporting

In order to ensure the assets are being used for their intended purpose, successful applicants will be required to submit their charity commission report, impact report or other agreed document which demonstrates use of the asset to the Council. This report should evidence the social impact and use of the property in line with the use laid out in their initial business plan.

If assets leased under a Community Lease are not being used for the agreed purpose, the Council will reserve the right to recover the asset. If the tenant is found to be breaking the terms of the Community Leasing agreement, then they will be given a period to remedy the situation as set out in their leasing agreement.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Full Application

Community Leasing Full Application

1. The Asset

Name of Asset	
Address of Asset	

2. Details of the organisation making the application

Name of Organisation	
Address of Organisation	
Telephone number	
Email address	

3. Contact Details

Your name	
Contact address	
Telephone number	
Email address	
Position in the Organisation	

4. Organisation Structure

What kind of organisation are you?
E.g., Registered charity, Community Interest Company etc. See Section 1.4 Eligibility of the Community Leasing Policy for eligible organisation types

Charity / Company number:

5. Governance

When was your organisation established?

Does your organisation have a written constitution, governing document, or set of rules? Yes No
If yes, please attach to this document

How many people are involved in your organisation in the following positions?

Management committee		Paid full time staff	
Paid part time staff		Volunteers	

Please tell us the type of insurance your organisation holds and provide the levels of cover.
E.g., Public Liability, Employer Liability, Professional Indemnity

6. Terms of Request

What is the length of lease that you are requesting? Please state your reasoning for this requested length of lease. *

**Note that leases will be of a minimum length of three years, with standard leases being seven years.*

Please attach a note setting out any other terms and conditions you wish to apply to the request.

7. Business Plan

For the following section, refer to Section 3.1 to read the Assessment Criteria which will be used to judge your application.

7.1 Use - Set out how you plan to use the asset. Explain the objectives of your project, why there is a need for it, and any activities that will take place there. Please also include your budget for the first year of the lease.

Please note that all applicants will be required to comply with statutory compliance regulations, such as planning permission, building regulations, electrical and fire safety regulations etc.

(500 words max)

7.2 Funding

Lay out how you intend to fund your lease payments or repairs and any investment commitment.

Established groups will need to provide accounts that demonstrate three years of good financial management.

For new groups, please provide an outline of how you propose to fund the rent you are prepared to pay for the land, as well as how you are going to hold the property and manage it effectively. You should show your calculations of the costs associated with the transfer of the land or building and your future use of it, including any redevelopment, ongoing maintenance and the costs of your activities. *

**Please note that Council grant funding cannot be used to fund rent or planned investment or repairs.*

(500 words max)

7.3 Investment / Development

Please set out any investment, development or changes you plan to make to the land or building. Business plans that propose to invest into the property will be given further consideration over the terms of the lease, in recognition of the investment into Council assets. (500 words max)

7.4 Social Value – Please set out the social value that will be generated should your application be approved. Consider how your proposal might generate social, economic or environmental benefits for the local community. Consider how your proposal will support either the Council's Social Value Local Priorities (found in the Social Value Policy) or Marmot Place objectives. If applicable, also detail how your proposal would support the Council to deliver any of its statutory services.

Please note that applications do not need to support multiple priorities, and there is no hierarchy of which priorities are preferable.
(500 words max)

7.5 Negative consequences – What negative consequences (if any) may occur if your request is agreed to? How would you propose to minimise these? You should consider any potential negative consequences for the local economy, environment, or any group of people, and explain how you could reduce these. (250 words max)

7.6 Level and Nature of Support - Please provide details of the level and nature of support for the request, from your community and, if relevant, from others. This could include information on the proportion of your community who are involved with the request, how you have engaged with your community beyond the members of your organisation and what their response has been. (250 words max)

8. Equalities and Inclusion

How will you ensure that your services / activities are inclusive for everyone in your community? (250 words max)

Completed application should be emailed to: Estates.Enquiries@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

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Oxfordshire County Council

Equalities Impact Assessment

COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER and COMMUNITY LEASING

24/03/2026

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	Properties and Assets
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing policies
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	They are a rework and extension of the current Community Asset Transfer policy.
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	These policies dictate how we can devolve OCC properties or assets to community groups at less than "best consideration" – that is market rate – in recognition of the social value and public benefit that these groups provide. Community Asset Transfer (CAT) refers to the transferral of ownership of a property whilst Community Leasing refers to the leasing of assets to VCS groups. Whilst these policies do not anticipate negative impacts, outcomes will be dependent on which groups apply for a CAT or Community Lease. Monitoring will therefore be important, and if any challenges or negative impacts are found we will review the EIA.
Completed By	James Cater
Authorised By	Jamie Kavanagh
Date of Assessment	24/03/2026

Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	These policies dictate how we can devolve OCC properties or assets to community groups at less than "best consideration" – that is market rate – in recognition of the social value and public benefit that these groups provide. Community Asset Transfer (CAT) refers to the transferral of ownership of a property, whilst Community Leasing refers to leasing out a property for less than best consideration. This policy is being updated for a few reasons. Firstly, there are currently a selection of VCS groups that are on "rent concessions", which are largely legacies from concessions made during the COVID pandemic. Updating and expanding these policy means that these groups can apply for a Community Lease. This both means that they have long term security (rather than having to come back and ask for an extension every year, which is time costly both for them and for county council officers), and also means that the system is made uniform and fair, and that other groups (who don't currently enjoy rent concessions) can also apply for a Community Lease. Making this process uniform and accountable also protects the Council from accusations of unfairness. Secondly, separating them out into CAT and Community Leasing clearly distinguishes between the two and makes the process simpler.
Proposals Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	Firstly, we decided to separate the policies into two: CAT to deal with transferral of ownership, Community Leasing for the leasing of properties. Whilst these policies are very similar, it means we know exactly what we're talking about. We will establish a Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Working Group. This group will have the role of assessing applications, as well as maintaining a list of properties that are available for CAT and Community Leasing. This list will be published online. This means that we are being proactive in looking to do them where we can, but also prudent and only offering them when we know it won't pose financial risk to the council. The policies will set out when we will do CAT or Community Leasing, the eligibility criteria for organisations who wish to apply, and the criteria by which we will assess them. The assessment criteria used to judge full applications look for how well the proposals support our Social Value Local Priorities (as set out in the 2026 Social Value Policy) and Marmot Place principles / projects, if they propose to invest into the property, their financial sustainability and benefit provided to local residents. A full application form is provided in order to make the application process is standardised, and it has been made as easy to follow as possible.

Evidence / Intelligence List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.	In updating the CAT policy, research was done checking against local and national best practice from where CAT policies have been successfully implemented in other local authorities. These policies were designed with input from throughout the Council. Procurement colleagues assisted with designing the scoring mechanism, and we are tying the Assessment Criteria to their Social Value Local Priorities. Workshops were ran on the policies which had representation from Properties and Assets, Economy and Place, Policy, Legal and Procurement. From 9th February to 9th March, we ran a period of VCS engagement through a Let's Talk Oxfordshire survey. We also ran a webinar on 5th March in which we got feedback in person. The feedback included widening how we were measuring the social value of applications, adding clarity on how rent level is calculated, and expanding how VCS groups could provide yearly reporting, and further explanation was added into the policies accordingly.
Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	Although we currently do have a CAT policy, it is not well known and is extremely rarely used. The alternatives to updating the policies, was doing nothing. Doing nothing would mean continuing the practice by which a handful of VCS tenants have ad hoc rent concessions. This is bad for them, as it means that they cannot properly financial plan for the future, and it is bad for us, as these concessions are difficulty to budget for and are inherently unfair (as there is no process by which they were chosen to not pay rent whilst other VCS tenants do), possibly opening OCC up to risk of accusations of unfairness. Now is also a particularly prudent time to update these policies, as with LGR approaching, there is the possibility that the properties portfolio will greatly increase - in the case of a successful One Oxfordshire bid, for example. Having a policy that is embedded in the council, and has been tested already, means that it will be far easier to replicate it as the opportunities for CAT or Community Leasing increases with the enlarged properties portfolio.

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated.	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.
Disability	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.
Gender Reassignment	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.
Marriage & Civil Partnership	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.

Pregnancy & Maternity	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.
Race	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.
Sex	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.
Sexual Orientation	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.
Religion or Belief	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated	The Full Application is a standardised form which has clear guidance for each section in order to make it as accessible as possible.	Nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working group.	A full review will take place after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises.

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Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated			
Armed Forces	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated			
Carers	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated			
Areas of deprivation	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated			

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Wider Impacts

Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Staff	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated			
Other Council Services	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated			
Providers	☒	☒	☐	No anticipated negative impacts are associated with this policy decision. Contingent on the organisation, only positive impacts are anticipated			
Social Value [1]	☐	☒	☐	Successful applicants for a CAT or Community Lease are required to show how their proposed use for the property provides a public			

[1] If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area

Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				benefit and relates to our Social Value Local Priorities.			

Section 4: Review

Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

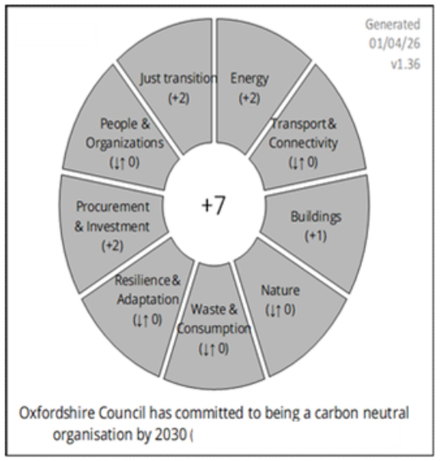
Review Date	**21/03/2027** (Full review after one year, and sooner if any significant challenge arises – as to be decided by the CAT / Community Leasing Working Group).
Person Responsible for Review	The nominated Property and Assets officer on the CAT / Community Leasing Working Group.
Authorised By	

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Climate Impact Assessment

Summary

Directorate and Service Area	Properties and Assets
What is being assessed	Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing policies
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	They are a rework and extension of the current Community Asset Transfer policy.
Summary of assessment	These policies have the objective of providing community assets for providing public benefit by either transfering ownership or leasing "at least than best consideration", that is less than their full market value. OCC has established in its Climate Action Framework that all properties in which it operates should achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, in addition all properties that are leased by the council should achieve net zero as soon as possible in the 2040's, since the county has decided to be ahead of the national 2050 net zero target. Transferring ownership of properties to community groups also transfers the responsibility for decarbonsing these properties to community groups. Community groups are known to be financially constrained but will have access to sources of decarbonisation funds that the council does not have access. Whilst the policies establish that properties that require capital investment are not elegible for CAT and Community Leasing, the council may still provide revenue funded support for decarbonisation provided resources and funds are available (subject also to LGR) after prioritising the council own's operational property and leased property decarbonisation. There is one untapped opportunity that the proposed policies should explore further: linking the community asset transfer programme to the councils's community energy strategies, so community properties can also benefit from renewable energy generation.
Completed by	James Cater, National Management Trainee, revised and amended by Franco Gonzalez, Carbon Analyst
Climate action sign off by	Franco Gonzalez, Carbon Analyst
Director sign off by	
Assessment date	31/03/2026



Detail of proposal

Context / Background	These policies dictate how we can devolve OCC properties or assets to community groups at less than “best consideration” – that is market rate – in recognition of the social value and public benefit that these groups provide. Community Asset Transfer (CAT) refers to the transferral of ownership of a property, whilst Community Leasing refers to leasing out a property for less than best consideration. This policy is being updated for a few reasons. Firstly, there are currently a selection of VCS groups that are on “rent concessions”, which are largely legacies from concessions made during the COVID pandemic. Updating and expanding these policy means that these groups can apply for a Community Lease. This both means that they have long term security (rather than having to come back and ask for an extension every year, which is time costly both for them and for county council officers), and also means that the system is made uniform and fair, and that other groups (who don’t currently enjoy rent concessions) can also apply for a Community Lease. Making this process uniform and accountable also protects the Council from accusations of unfairness. Secondly, separating them out into CAT and Community Leasing clearly distinguishes between the two and makes the process simpler.
Proposal	Firstly, we decided to separate the policies into two: CAT to deal with transferral of ownership, Community Leasing for the leasing of properties. Whilst these policies are very similar, it means we know exactly what we’re talking about. We will establish a Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Working Group. This group will have the role of assessing applications, as well as maintaining a list of properties that are available for CAT and Community Leasing. This list will be published online. This means that we are being proactive in looking to do them where we can, but also prudent and only offering them when we know it won’t pose financial risk to the council. The policies will set out when we will do CAT or Community Leasing, the eligibility criteria for organisations who wish to apply, and the criteria by which we will assess them. The assessment criteria used to judge full applications look for how well the proposals support our Social Value Local Priorities (as set out in the 2026 Social Value Policy) and Marmot Place principles / projects, if they propose to invest into the property, their financial sustainability and benefit provided to local residents.
Evidence / Intelligence	In updating the CAT policy, research was done checking against local and national best practice from where CAT policies have been successfully implemented in other local authorities. These policies were designed with input from throughout the Council. Procurement colleagues assisted with designing the scoring mechanism, and we are tying the Assessment Criteria to their Social Value Local Priorities. Workshops were ran on the policies which had representation from Properties and Assets, Economy and Place, Policy, Legal and Procurement. From 9th February to 9th March, we ran a period of VCS engagement through a Let’s Talk Oxfordshire survey. We also ran a webinar on 5th March in which we got feedback in person. None of the feedback on these policies related to environmental concerns. The feedback included widening how we were measuring the social value of applications, adding clarity on how rent level is calculated, and expanding how VCS groups could provide yearly reporting.
Alternatives considered / rejected	Although we currently do have a CAT policy, it is not well known and is extremely rarely used. The alternatives to updating the policies, was doing nothing. Doing nothing would mean continuing the practice by which a handful of VCS tenants have ad hoc rent concessions. This is bad for them, as it means that they cannot properly financial plan for the future, and it is bad for us, as these concessions are difficulty to budget for and are inherently unfair (as there is no process by which they were chosen to not pay rent whilst other VCS tenants do), possibly opening OCC up to risk of accusations of unfairness. Now is also a particularly prudent time to update these policies, as with LGR approaching, there is the possibility that the properties portfolio will greatly increase - in the case of a successful One Oxfordshire bid, for example. Having a policy that is embedded in the council, and has been tested already, means that it will be far easier to replicate it as the opportunities for CAT or Community Leasing increases with the enlarged properties portfolio.

Category	Impact criteria	Score (-3 to +3)	Description of impact	Actions or mitigations to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timeline and monitoring arrangements
Energy	Increases energy efficiency	1	In the case of Community Leases, central government regulations require that Non-Domestic Privately Rented Properties (including those rented by local authorities) comply with Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard Regulations such as achieving an EPC of C by 2027 and an EPC of B between 2030-25 (specific year to be confirmed by central government in 2026). The Council is aware of these regulations.	N/A		
Energy	Promotes a switch to low-carbon or renewable energy	1	There is an opportunity for promoting renewable energy generation in assests transferred to community groups (akin to Community Energy schemes). The Council can provide guidance and link community groups to community energy leaders in Oxfordshire (e.g. Low Carbon Hub). This opportunity is not explored in this proposal.	Explore missed opportunities for linking CAT policy with the council's community energy strategies.		
Energy	Promotes resilient, local, smart energy systems	N/A		N/A		
Transport & Connectivity	Reduces need to travel and/or the need for private car ownership	N/A		N/A		
Transport & Connectivity	Supports active travel	N/A		N/A		
Transport & Connectivity	Increases use of public transport	N/A		N/A		
Transport & Connectivity	Accelerates electrification of transport	N/A		N/A		
Buildings	Promotes net zero new builds and developments	N/A	Policies will not lead to any new building development.	N/A		
Buildings	Accelerates retrofitting of existing buildings	1	Subject to resource and funds availability (and subject to any changes resulting from Local Government Reorganisation), OCC may work with community groups to invest, maintain and repair including retrofitting in properties that are devolved through CAT or Community Leasing. Many community groups are anticipated to have limited resources however also have access to different funding streams closed to the authority, the Council can work with the community groups concerning the properties transferred or leased to ensure best outcomes for the community.	N/A		
Nature	Protects, restores or enhances biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems	N/A		N/A		
Nature	Develops blue and green infrastructure	N/A		N/A		
Nature	Improves access to nature and green spaces	N/A		N/A		
Waste & Consumption	Reduces overall consumption	N/A		N/A		
Waste & Consumption	Supports waste prevention and drive reuse and recycling	N/A		N/A		
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to flooding	N/A		N/A		
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to other extreme weather events (e.g., storms, cold snaps, heatwaves, droughts)	N/A		N/A		
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience of council services, communities, energy systems, transport infrastructure and/or supply chains	N/A		N/A		
Procurement & Investment	Procurement practices prioritise low-carbon options, circular economy and	N/A		N/A		

Procurement & Investment	Investment being considered supports climate action/ is consistent with path to net zero	1	Both leased assets (part of council's Scope 3 emissions) and properties whose ownership has been transferred to community groups need to achieve net zero as soon as possible in the 2040's following OCC's Climate Action Framework. Within this target, following the GHG protocol, the council has direct responsibility to decarbonise leased assets whereas in the case of transferred properties the responsibility will fall to community groups who acquire ownership of properties. Nevertheless, as stated above, subject to resource and funds availability (and subject to any changes resulting from Local Government Reorganisation), OCC may work with community groups to invest, maintain and repair including retrofitting in properties that are devolved through CAT or Community Leasing.	N/A
People & Organizations	Drives behavioural change to address the climate and ecological emergency	N/A		N/A
People & Organizations	Drives organizational and systemic change to address the climate and ecological emergency	N/A		N/A
Just transition	Promotes green innovation and job creation	N/A		N/A
Just transition	Promotes health and wellbeing	N/A		N/A
Just transition	Reduces poverty and inequality	2	Community asset transfer has the potential to address inequality, measures have been taken for local government assets sold under lower than market price are not resold to private for profit organisations and therefore lost to the community sector (section 3.2 Long Term Considerations).	N/A

CABINET – 21 April 2026

UPDATES TO 'PARKING STANDARDS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS'

Report by Director of Economy and Place

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

   adopt the proposed updates to the 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document as set out in Annex 1.

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), adopted July 2022, outlines a clear vision to deliver a net-zero Oxfordshire transport and travel system by 2040. One of the policies within the LTCP supporting this vision is Policy 33, which sets out how Oxfordshire County Council is seeking to reduce and restrict car parking availability while also creating more attractive places for residents to live and work in.

3. Policy 33 is supported by the Parking Standards for New Developments document, which stated that it would be reviewed every 12-18 months and updated when appropriate. These reviews have taken place and a need to update the document has been identified.

4. In December 2024 the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated to include a requirement for developments to follow a vision-led approach to transport planning. Updates to the Parking Standards for New Developments document are required to reflect these changes. Innovative ways to improve parking provisions and revise the document have also been identified, informed by the experiences gained from its use since its adoption.

5. These proposed updates are recommended to be adopted by Cabinet in order to allow the relevant County Council officers to continue to require the implementation of the approach in practice, in line with national and local policy, through planning applications for new developments.

Background

6. The existing Parking Standards for New Developments document was adopted by Cabinet in October 2022 and revised in January 2023 as a formal supplementary document to Oxfordshire County Council's LTCP. Since its adoption this document has begun to influence how new development sites are master planned / designed by reducing and restricting car parking availability at both source and destination. This approach has been recognised in the

construction industry and has incentivised developers to come forward with innovative design concepts to align with the County Council's LTCP ambitions.

7. Following internal review of the application methodology for the revised guidance, coupled with assessment against emerging evidence, this proposed revision of the guidance ensures that the standards are sufficiently rigorous, ambitious, clear and that they are fully aligned with the Council's wider objectives for reducing private car trips overall.

The document's purpose

8. The primary objective of this review is to align the parking standards more robustly with the Oxfordshire LTCP target to reduce car trips on the road network. The updated document serves as an essential tool to help deliver this objective by ensuring new developments continue to be designed to prioritise sustainable travel from the outset.

9. The changes are aimed to facilitate, where appropriate, a move towards 'Car Free' and / or 'Car Light' developments, thereby reducing the potential for car ownership and usage associated with new housing and commercial development sites.

10. The updated document has been externally tested to confirm that, in practice as well as in principle, the standards will reliably support the delivery of walkable, mixed-use and sustainable neighbourhoods. This additional scrutiny has helped sharpen key criteria and strengthen the document's enforceability.

Proposed updates

11. The key changes proposed for this updated document significantly strengthen the criteria under which 'Car Free' development can be supported, this includes:

- Clarity on applicability: Providing clearer guidance on the specific locations and circumstances (e.g. highly accessible sites, locations with or with potential for excellent public transport links) where a full Car Free approach is appropriate and deliverable.

Introduction of Car Light Development Criteria

12. A new and crucial section within the document has been incorporated to formally introduce a criteria for 'Car Light' developments. This approach recognises that a full Car Free approach may not be feasible in all areas (e.g. some rural or less accessible suburban locations).

- Definition: A Car Light development is defined by significantly reduced parking provision, coupled with substantial investment in sustainable travel infrastructure and incentives.

- Criteria: The criteria sets out clear requirements for a development to be considered Car Light, including:

- Upper Limit (maximum) residential parking ratios that are demonstrably lower than standard.
- Mandatory implementation of Car Clubs and/or Shared Mobility Hubs.
- Provision of excellent pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and connections / links.

Changes to walking distance thresholds for Car Free Development

13. As part of the preparation of these updated parking standards, research has been conducted to inform and support the proposed changes to the walking distance thresholds used in the criteria for when car free development should be required. This research paper can be found at Annex 2.

14. These refinements reflect both officer learning from applying the existing standards and the findings of the independent external review, which tested the draft standards for clarity, practical deliverability and alignment with LTCP policy.

15. The **current** Parking Standards stipulate that where parts of a development are within the following walking distances and on the edge of Oxford, they are *required* to be car free (see paragraph 6.2 of the existing standards):

Car free development will be *required* where parts of a development are within…
400m of a… • Public transport service (15 to 30 minute)
800m of a… • GP surgery • Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food) • Primary school • Secondary school • Employment area (such as a town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate, or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university, etc.)

16. The use of the 800m walking distance was based on the principle of a 20-minute walk (or liveable neighbourhood concept), which was deemed appropriate at the time. However, since the adoption of these standards, review of the evidence on walking distances (see Annex 2) has led to the view that these current stipulations are potentially overly restrictive, resulting in few locations meeting the criteria for car free development. As such, research has been conducted to establish whether there is evidence that would support adjusting these parameters.

17. The officers' interpretation of the further research identified scope to amend the walking distances set out in the existing standards document, which are now proposed to be amended as detailed in paragraph 18 of this report.

18. The proposed updates that are subject to this report are summarised below. For parts of a development that are within (or could reasonably be expected to be within on the completion of a development site) the following walking distances in Oxford, on the edge of Oxford (see paragraph 4.15 of the proposed standards), or within a town, a car free approach will be *required.*

Car Free development will be *required* where parts of a development are within…
600m of a… • **Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour)**
800m of a… • **Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)**
1000 of a… • **Train station (served by 2 trains per hour)**
1600m of a… • **Primary school** • **Healthcare provision (such as a GP surgery or pharmacy)**
3,200m of a… • **Secondary school** • **Employment area (such as a town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate, or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university, etc.)**

19. For parts of a development that are within (or could reasonably be expected to be within on the completion of a development site) the following walking distances in Oxford, on the edge of Oxford, or within a town, (see paragraph 4.17 of the proposed standards), a car light approach will be *required.*

Car Light development will be *required* where parts of a development are within…
800m of a… • **Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour) or**
1600m of a… • **Primary school** • **Train station (served by 2 trains per hour)** • **Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)**
3,200m of a… • **Secondary school** • **Healthcare provision (such as a GP surgery or pharmacy)** • **Employment area (such as a town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate, or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university, etc.)**

20. In some circumstances, depending on the location of a development site and the availability of local amenities and services, it may be required for a development proposal to provide both car-free and car-light approaches within different parts of a site. Such an approach would need to be supported with an evidence-based mapping exercise. Officers will work collaboratively with developers and site consultants to help develop such mapping examples.

Updated Residential Cycle Parking Standards (LTN 1/20 Alignment)

21. The residential cycle parking standards have been comprehensively revised to bring them into full alignment with the Department for Transport's (DfT) national guidance, Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20).

22. This revision has been brought forward from constructive feedback received from local planning authorities and the development industry. This feedback has identified that the existing residential cycle parking standards are significantly higher than the national guidance, resulting in over-provision of cycle parking. For example, the existing standards requires 2 spaces per bedroom, whereas LTN 1/20 requires 1 space per bedroom.

23. This update is not anticipated to reduce active travel behaviours as the current provision is beyond maximum demand.

Essential Policy Alignment and Implementation

24. To ensure the new criteria for Car Free and Car Light development is robust and legally defensible in planning terms, the reliance on the parking standards as guidance must be underpinned by a formal adopted policy.

25. The existing parking standards are a supplementary guidance document to the LTCP. Formal policy within the LTCP, which is a statutory, high level strategic transport plan, will provide the necessary strategic and legal justification to enforce these key sustainability aspirations.

26. It is recommended that if the revised parking standards are agreed and adopted by Cabinet, they shall be brought into immediate effect.

Policy Implications and Next Steps

27. These updates are essential for supporting the carbon reduction and air quality improvement targets across Oxfordshire. By strengthening the criteria for reduced-car development, Oxfordshire County Council is taking proactive steps to influence travel behaviour associated with new growth in the county.

Focus Area	Expected Outcome
Car Free / Light	Reduced car ownership/trips, especially for local journeys. Lower congestion and fewer emissions.
LTN 1/20 Cycle Standards	Increased use of cycling due to better and more secure facilities, supporting health and well-being.
LTCP Alignment	Delivery of strategic transport goals and a transition to a more sustainable, well-connected transport system.

28. Subject to Cabinet adoption, the revised standards will be communicated to district and city councils, developers and design teams to support consistent application. Officers will also update supporting guidance and templates where needed to ensure smooth implementation across planning processes.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

29. The County Council's 'Strategic Plan: 2025-28', sets out a vision for greener, fairer, and healthier county. By helping to put into practice policy within the Oxfordshire LTCP, the 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document will help to deliver aspects of this vision.

30. By ensuring that the revised Parking Standards for New Developments is implemented through proposed developments (alongside the updated Decide and Provide approach), thus prioritising reduced parking levels, active travel and public transport interventions, the document will contribute to delivering the following wider objectives identified in the Strategic Plan:

- We will continue to roll out our Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, which aims to cut carbon emissions from transport. This means encouraging people to use public transport, cycling and walking instead of driving.

Financial Implications

31. The implementation of this document's requirements is not expected to have implications for staff resource, as the assessment of parking provisions for development proposals is already undertaken by officers. The revised parking standards will not create any additional resource pressures to those that already exist. As such, it is not expected that there will be any revenue or capital resource implications.

Rob Finlayson, Finance Business Partner, Rob.Finlayson@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

32. The implementation of this document's requirements is not expected to have any legal implications as the assessment of parking provisions for development proposals is already undertaken by officers. The revised parking standards are not expected to create any additional resource pressures to those that already exist.

33. As local highway authority, Oxfordshire County Council is a statutory consultee on planning applications under the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The production and adoption of statutory documents, such as the LTCP, and supporting guidance documents, including the Parking Standards for New Developments and revisions thereto, enable the highway authority to fulfil its role as statutory consultee and promote policy compliant development.

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor, Jennifer.Crouch@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

34. The implementation of this revised document is not expected to generate any implications for staff resource, as the assessment of parking provisions for development proposals is already undertaken by officers. Some training will be required for appropriate teams but is not anticipated to create any additional resource pressures that don't already exist. As such, it is not expected that there will be any staff implications.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

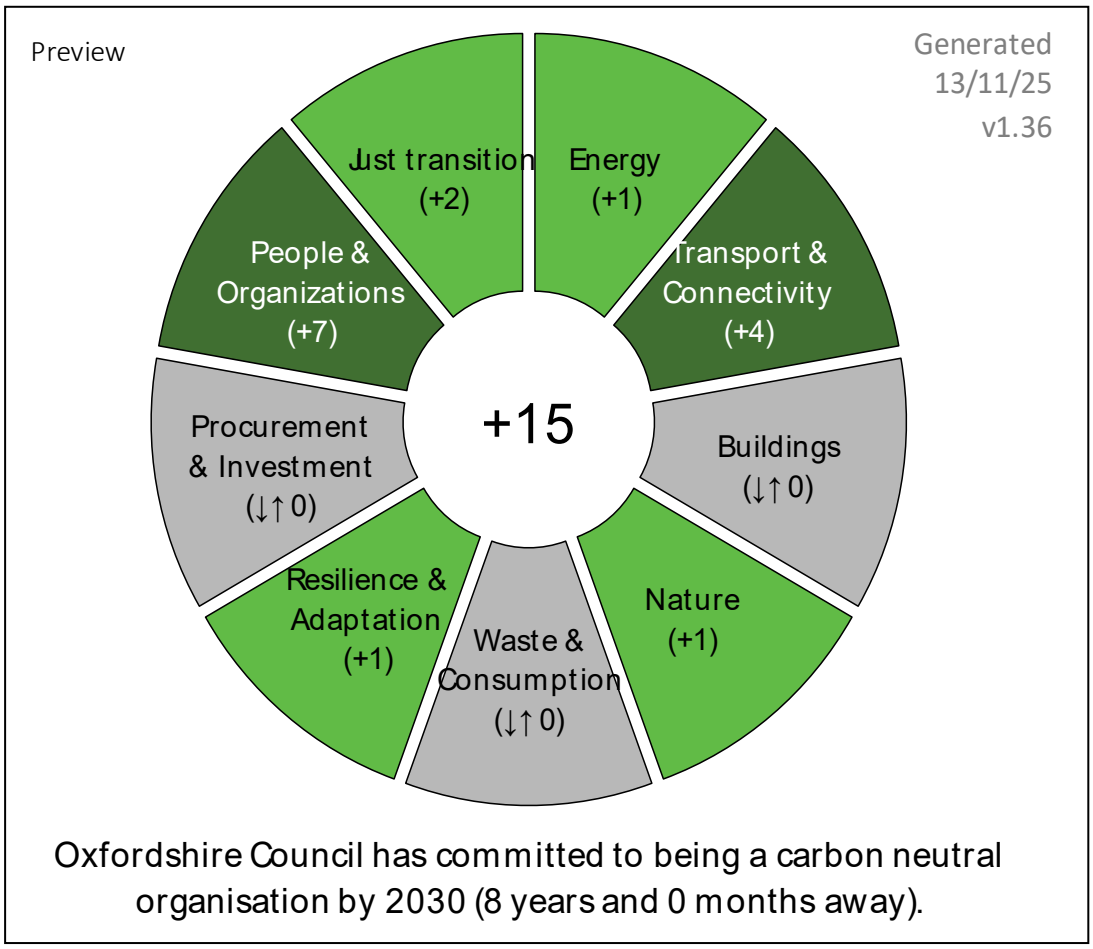
35. The Implementing of the revised 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document will help towards ensuring that new developments will be provided with an appropriate level of parking provision for all users of the highway network. One of the objectives of this document is to ensure development proposals, whilst provided with appropriate parking provision, do not detract from the character of a place to live, or work that is sought through the planning process.

36. The Equalities Impact Assessment, which can be found at Annex 3, shows that there is likely to be a benefit to various individuals, groups, and communities as a result of this document being implemented as it should make a positive contribution to ensuring that a wider range of travel choices are available to all.

Sustainability Implications

37. As one of the key means of implementing the aims of the LTCP, the 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document will play an important role in helping to deliver the aims of Oxfordshire County Council's Climate Action Framework and realising the goal of decarbonising the transport and travel system.

38. A Climate Impact Assessment has been undertaken, and the resultant report can be found in Annex 4. As illustrated in the scoring summary wheel below, the document has been identified as making a positive contribution to climate action across various categories.



Risk Management

39. With this revised document there remains a potential risk through implementing reduced levels of car parking for new developments (and redevelopments) in that this may lead to indiscriminate car parking taking place on the public highway, causing highway safety implications. This risk is considered within the document and can be minimised with quality development master planning, including appropriate design / mitigation measures and through other transport mode choices being made available.

40. Another potential risk is that the local planning authorities within Oxfordshire do not embed the requirements of this document appropriately in their respective Local Plans. This may cause issues with the implementation of the document as it may hold less weight in planning decisions if it remains only a requirement of the LTCP.

41. However, engagement has taken place with officers at each of the four district councils and the city council to ensure that they understand the proposed changes. Responses have been positive. Additionally, engagement with members of these councils is also planned so that they might also understand the intent of the document. It is hoped that the revised document will receive support from the district councils and city council as its aims broadly accord with the strategic policies of all Oxfordshire councils.

42. In addition, to reduce this risk further it is proposed that an additional, dedicated policy supporting Car Free and Car Light development is written, consulted upon, and formally adopted within the LTCP.

Consultations

43. Parking Standards for New Developments is a technical document intended to implement policy in the Oxfordshire LTCP and as such the comprehensive consultation exercise for the Oxfordshire LTCP encompasses the intent of this document.

44. However, as part of the process of developing the original version of the document (adopted in October 2022), significant engagement took place with internal colleagues, officers at the district and city councils, industry professionals, relevant Oxfordshire County Council cabinet members (i.e. those with transport-related portfolios), National Highways, and the authors of the guidance upon which the document is based. The comments derived from that engagement process were then used to inform the final version of the document.

45. Additional technical assurance was sought through external consultancy for the current revision to ensure that the proposed standards were sufficiently rigorous, ambitious, and capable of delivering the County Council's aims for car-free and car-light developments and the wider objectives of the LTCP. This review applied a structured and evidence-led assessment of the draft standards, examining whether they were genuinely vision-led, clear and enforceable, and aligned with the delivery of walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods. The reviewers also examined whether the draft standards supported the LTCP's wider principles of proximity, mixed use, and the need for development to address any missing local services. The outcome of this analysis has been incorporated into the proposed revised standards.

ROBIN ROGERS
Director of Economy and Place

Annex 1: Parking Standards for New Developments document (final draft)
Annex 2: Parking Standards for New Developments: Walking Distances Review February 2026
Annex 3: Equalities Impact Assessment
Annex 4: Climate Impact Assessment

Background papers:Nil

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April 2026

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Parking Standards for New Developments (April 2026 update)

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FINAL DRAFT

Vehicular and Cycle Parking Standards

1.0 Introduction

1.1. The availability of parking, at both source and destination, has a significant influence on the type of transport people choose for their journeys. Striking the right balance by providing an appropriate level and type of parking, whilst also protecting highway safety for all users, and promoting active and sustainable transport modes is essential. This revised document has been prepared with this design rationale in mind, and in support of the adopted Local Transport Connectivity Plan (LTCP) Policies and the County Council's targets to:

- *Replace or remove 1 out of every 4 current car trips in Oxfordshire by 2030.*
- *Deliver a net-zero transport network and replace or remove an additional 1 out of every 3 current car trips in Oxfordshire by 2040.*
- *To deliver a transport network that contributes to a climate positive future by 2050.*

1.2. New development sites will need to work collaboratively with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) to help achieve these targets. One key component to support this approach is to revise the existing parking standards for new developments, ensuring they will accord with the council's objective to reduce 25% of car trips by 2030, and a further 33% by 2040. In essence, the approach being taken for development proposals is that if on-site parking is restricted at both the origin of a journey and its destination location, this will influence people's travel behaviour and encourage alternative modes of travel to be used rather than that of the private car, such as walking, cycling and public transport use.

1.3. Due to the diverse nature of development that is promoted in Oxfordshire a wide range of social and economic circumstances means OCC must have a flexible approach to identifying appropriate levels of parking provision. Such an approach is expected to provide a level of accessibility by private car that is consistent with the overall balance of the transport system at local levels and the priorities set out in OCC's Strategic Plan 2025-28'.

1.4. OCC, in its role as the local highway authority, is a statutory consultee in respect of planning considerations that affect the public highway and responds to planning application proposals when consulted by all local planning authorities. OCC provides advice to local planning authorities on transport implications, such as parking levels of development proposals to assist in their decision-making process. OCC is also consulted during the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans and may provide advice on the soundness of policies that relate to parking in new developments.

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1.5. Concerns relating to deficiencies in car parking leads to a desire amongst local communities for more car parking spaces. On these occasions OCC may express concerns about accommodating for car parking demand in areas that might already have congestion and air quality issues.

1.6. Oxfordshire, particularly Oxford City and the towns within the county continue to benefit from the popularity of cycling both for commuting and leisure purposes. This means that the inclusion of high-quality cycle parking is essential in all new developments to complement the infrastructure that is being delivered by development sites; and schemes that are identified in the emerging LTCP Area Strategies and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (see Active travel | Oxfordshire County Council). In addition, all electric vehicles are to be catered for with electrical charging points being integral to all new development.

1.7. This parking standards document has been prepared to outline OCC's further revised approach to parking at new developments. It is to be used to help determine the level of parking at all new developments and provide the basis for OCC's advice to the local planning authorities on development proposals and the soundness of policies related to parking for new developments.

1.8. This updated document replaces OCC's previous Parking Standards for New Developments document, adopted in October 2022 and revised in January 2023, the parking guidance "Transport for New Developments Parking Standards for New Residential Developments" dated December 2011; the 2015 Second Edition of the County Council's Residential Road Design Guide and paragraph 2.4.1 of the Oxfordshire Cycling Design Standards document dated 2017.

2.0 Background

National Policy Context

2.1. The original car and cycle parking standards that OCC has been using when assessing development proposals were prepared some time ago and had fallen behind national and local policies. Following adoption of the revised OCC parking standards in 2023, this document is intended to further update these standards while incorporating the guidance provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) dated February 2025. Paragraph 112 confirms that when setting local parking standards for both residential and non-residential development, policies should consider:

a) the accessibility of the development.
b) the type, mix and use of development.
c) the availability of and opportunities for public transport.
d) local car ownership levels; and
e) the need to ensure an adequate provision of spaces for charging plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles.

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2.2. The NPPF (paragraph 113) also confirms that '*Maximum parking standards for residential and non-residential development should only be set where there is a clear and compelling justification that they are necessary for managing the local road network, or for optimising the density of development in city and town centres and other locations that are well served by public transport (in accordance with chapter 11 of this Framework). In town centres, local authorities should seek to improve the quality of parking so that it is convenient, safe, and secure, alongside measures to promote accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists*.'

2.3. The NPPF also describes the plan-making system which includes local and neighbourhood plans that guide local communities to develop and shape their own surroundings. These plans often contain policies on car and cycle parking.

Local Context

2.4. Oxfordshire is a large county and has many local characteristics from dense urban areas, through market towns, to rural villages and hamlets. These variations influence the demographics and economic situations of the county, and consequently car ownership and the parking behaviour of Oxfordshire residents in its distinctly different areas.

2.5. This parking standards document should be used alongside OCC's Street Design Guide and appropriate secure by design provisions. When used together they accord with the NPPF requirements by supporting a flexible approach to development proposals according to local circumstances.

3.0. Structure of this document

3.1. The following principles outline OCC's approach to parking for all new development (and redevelopment) proposals and is to be used to inform the design process of a development site. This document is considered to be a 'live' document and will be reviewed alongside local and national policy as appropriate. It is anticipated that reviews of this document will take place every 12 to 18 months.

4.0. Principles of this document

4.1. The general content of this document should be read in conjunction with:

- NPPF February 2025
- Planning Practice Guidance
- LTCP adopted July 2022.
- Implementing Decide & Provide: Requirements for Transport Assessments (December 2025)
- OCC's Street Design Guide Part 1 adopted September 2021 and Part 2 Adoptable Highway Criteria adopted in May 2024.
- Secured by Design Guides
- Oxfordshire's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy adopted March 2021.

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- Manual for Streets' (MfS) published 2007 by the Department of Transport Communities and Government.
- Manual for Streets 2' (MfS2) published in 2010 by the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation.
- Local Transport Note 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design; and
- Car Parking: What Works Where by English Partnerships.

4.2. This document is not intended to favour or disfavour the private car as a mode of transport but emphasises the need to control and design parking levels for new developments at a reduced level without increasing the risk of indiscriminate parking i.e. parking on any provision for walking, wheeling and cycling, whilst also ensuring new developments are designed in line with OCC's LTCP Transport User Hierarchy and the NPPF's requirement to prioritise sustainable transport modes (paragraph 115, a).

4.3. The amount of car parking available must be enough to avoid any adverse effects to highway safety by not providing a sufficient level (i.e. encouraging on-street displaced parking). Parking provisions for new developments are required to provide a sufficient level (unless car-free) to accommodate the parking demand of a site, while also utilising and encouraging the potential for sustainable and active travel by other modes of transport.

4.4. In revising the car parking standards, car ownership levels across Oxfordshire have been reviewed using the 2011 and 2021 Census data. This review has confirmed that on average the car / van ownership per household has reduced slightly over this 10-year period to 1.4. This data has been considered in the development of these car parking standards.

4.5. If car parking is expected to take place on existing streets, then it must be demonstrated there is adequate capacity on-street through a robust parking capacity survey (paragraphs 9.1. to 9.7.) while also proving there will be no highway safety implications from such a proposal.

4.6. Parking demand in residential developments are to be determined by taking into consideration the following factors:

a) *A site's location.*
b) *Dwelling size (rooms) and tenure.*
c) *Parking provision (allocated or unallocated); and*
d) *Parking controls / enforcement.*
e) *Proximity to local and public transport services*

4.7. The calculation of expected levels of parking demand is to be based on local or comparable data taking into consideration forecast changes in demand for the local plan period. Tables 1, 2, 3(a) and 3(b) provide residential car parking provisions to be used to calculate the parking demand for a new development proposal.

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4.8. Determining the parking demand for non-residential developments within Oxfordshire has been revised to accord with the council's objective to reduce 25% of car trips by 2030, and a further 33% by 2040. The approach being taken for such development proposals is that if on-site parking is restricted / reduced at a destination location this will influence people's travel behaviour and encourage alternative active travel modes to be used rather than that of the private car.

4.9. Each non-residential development will continue to be assessed on its merits and in accordance with OCC's Implementing *Decide and Provide* Requirements for Transport Assessment approach to development. Each development proposal will be assessed on its location, land-use; the trip rate associated with the development and the employees / visitors of the site, access to local facilities and public transport services.

4.10. All non-residential development proposals are required to provide an operational need only provision of car parking as a starting point. Where this may not be practical for the operation of the site, a robust evidence-based justification must be made for the parking levels provided in Table 4 to be considered.

4.11. Due to the diverse nature of development that is promoted in Oxfordshire, OCC welcomes innovative ways to provide parking solutions. While this is the case all stakeholders involved in designing a development must be mindful of the parking principles identified in this document and guidance provided in OCC's Street Design Guide Parts 1 and 2 (and subsequent updates).

Design Considerations

4.12. Parking design is an important factor when preparing a master plan for a development proposal as it ensures an appropriate number of spaces are provided without detracting from the character of a place to live or work in. Developers are expected to provide a balanced, mixed, and flexible parking provision, while ensuring that all spaces are useable without creating highway safety issues, such as vehicles overhanging footways and cycle routes and requiring cyclists to travel in the 'door zone'. Such designs are required to reflect the guidance within the documents referenced in paragraph 4.1.

4.13. To ensure that developments function safely and efficiently, the following parking design requirements are to be considered:

- Parking provisions are to be designed in accordance with local and national standards ensuring 'secured by design provisions' Secured by Design - SBD Design Guides are considered.
- On-plot garages must be at least 6m into a plot to allow for a full car space whilst being able to open the garage door.
- If garages (and car ports) are to be counted towards on-site parking allocations, they must have minimum internal dimensions of 6m in length and 3m in width. These are measured between any internal structure, such as piers.

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- All new houses (and flats / apartments) with on-plot / allocated parking should have an electrical vehicle charging point.
- Provide adequate visitor parking at new residential developments for people arriving by bicycle and by car.
- Where there may be a risk of indiscriminate parking which may block or otherwise impair the quality and usability of walking and cycling facilities, controls on parking (including double yellow lines, CPZs, etc.) may be required to be implemented before a site is adopted via a Section 38 Agreement.
- High standard cycle storage facilities must be provided on-plot. This provision may vary subject to dwelling size and type. Such levels are to be provided to a minimum level as set out in LTN 1/20 for residential cycle parking standards and Table 4 of this document for non-residential development proposals.
- All cycling parking is to be provided in a convenient secure location close to building entrances and bus stop locations. Such provisions are to be covered, lit (where appropriate) and in the style of a Sheffield stand, which are individually installed permanently into the floor material (e.g. not toast-rack style stands bolted to the floor).
- Double decked, vertical cycle parking or other arrangements should not be used unless agreed by OCC in specific circumstances.
- The spacing of stands should be as per LTN 1/20. If raised on a kerb, dropped kerbs must be provided in suitable locations. Cycle parking should cater for non-standard cycles e.g. cargo bikes.
- Motorcycle parking – provisions should be consistent with 'MfS'.
- Bin storage must be designed away from cycle and car parking facilities to ensure access is not obstructed.

Residential Cycle Parking Provision

4.14. Cycle parking provisions associated with all residential development must be provided in accordance with Table 11-1 within the Department for Transport's (DfT) national guidance, Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20).

Table 11-1: Suggested minimum cycle parking capacity for different types of land use

Land use type	Sub-category	Short stay requirement (obvious, easily accessed and close to destination)	Long stay requirement (secure and ideally covered)
All	Parking for adapted cycles for disabled people	5% of total capacity co-located with disabled car parking.	5% of total capacity co-located with disabled car parking.
Retail	Small (<200m²)	1 per 100m²	1 per 100m²
	Medium (200-1,000m²)	1 per 200m²	1 per 200m²
	>1,000m²	1 per 250m²	1 per 500m²
Employment	Office/Finance (A2/B1)	1 per 1000m²	1 per 200m²
	Industrial/Warehousing (B2/B8)	1 per 1,000m²	1 per 500m²
Leisure and Institutions	Leisure centres, assembly halls, hospitals and healthcare	Greatest of: 1 per 50m² or 1 per 30 seats/ capacity	1 per 5 employees
	Educational Institutions	–	Separate provision for staff and students. Based on Travel Plan mode share targets, minimum: Staff: 1 per 20 staff Students; 1 per 10 students
Residential	All except sheltered/elderly housing or nursing homes	–	1 per bedroom

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Car Free Developments

4.15. Car-Free development means that no car parking spaces are provided within the development site, other than those reserved for disabled people and car clubs. Car free development is required by OCC where any such development proposals meet all of the following criteria:

a) If the proposed site is located within Oxford city, on the edge of Oxford City or within a town it must be provided with appropriate parking restrictions imposed within its vicinity.
b) The site has access (or will be provided with) excellent connections to pedestrian & cycle infrastructure and be within 600m direct walking distance of frequent (2 buses per hour) bus services **or** 1000m walking distance to frequent (2 per hour) rail services. These frequences should be based on any new or upgraded services associated with the new development.
c) The site is located within the following walking distances to the local amenities and services listed below (both existing and proposed within a development site):

800m
- Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)

1600m
- Primary school
- Healthcare provision (e.g. GP surgery or pharmacy)

3200m
- Secondary school
- Significant area of employment (such as a town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate, or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university, etc.)

d) Parking provisions must be provided for people with impaired mobility (in accordance with relevant current legislation).

4.16. For developments that are required provide a car free approach or one with reduced on-site parking provisions, OCC will require such sites to incorporate a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) into a site's master plan or wider area where a CPZ does not already exist. Such development proposals will be required through the master planning process to demonstrate provision of the necessary supporting infrastructure and high-quality design to deter indiscriminate car parking to ensure excellent and sustainable place making is achieved. CPZ requirements will be included as part of any legal agreement associated with a planning permission and when the CPZ is needed to be operational i.e. before the site is adopted via a Section 38 Agreement.

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Car Light Developments

4.17. The approach for Car Light developments is to be "Car-Light" rather than strictly "Car-Free." A "Car-Free" development is one where no private car parking is provided, except for disabled users and car clubs. While Car Light developments will not meet this definition, they will contribute to reducing car use and ownership through a flexible and proactive strategy and the utilisation of space that can be re-purposed, that enables adaption to future travel behaviour changes.

4.18. Car Light is required by OCC where any such development proposals meets **a)** and two of the following **b)** criteria:

a) The proposed site is located within Oxford city or an edge of Oxford City sites or a town with (or will be provided with) parking restrictions imposed within its vicinity.
b) The site has access (or will be provided with) excellent connections to pedestrian & cycle infrastructure and be within 800m direct walking distance of frequent (2 buses per hour) bus services **or** 1600m from rail services. These frequences should be based on any new or upgraded services associated with the new development.
c) The site is located within the following walking distances to the local amenities and services listed below (both existing and proposed within a development site):

1600m
- Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)
- Primary school

3200m
- Healthcare provision (e.g. GP surgery or pharmacy)
- Secondary school
- Significant area of employment (such as a town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate, or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university, etc.)

d) Parking provisions must be provided for people with impaired mobility (in accordance with relevant current legislation).

4.19. The core principles of this Car Light approach are:

a) **Prioritise Sustainable Transport**: The development's design must prioritise walking, cycling, and public transport over private car use.
b) **Decide and Provide**: The approach is to first set a vision for a sustainable development and then provide the necessary infrastructure to achieve it, rather than simply accommodating forecast car traffic.
c) **Reduced and Remote Parking**: On plot car parking will be minimised and provided in a way that discourages car use. This includes locating car parking in secure communal / designated areas or further from dwellings to make usage less convenient for short journeys.

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d) **Flexibility**: The approach is designed to be flexible, allowing the level and nature of car parking provision to adapt as accessibility to non-car options improves and as demand for residential parking decreases over time.

4.20. For developments that are to promote a Car Light approach, OCC will require such sites to incorporate a CPZ into a site's master plan where a CPZ does not already exist to prevent inappropriate on-street parking taking place. Such development proposals will be required to provide the necessary infrastructure to bring forward such a scheme and the associated costs i.e. Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) for enforcement purposes. These CPZ requirements will be included as part of any legal agreement associated with an appropriate planning permission and when the CPZ is needed to be operational i.e. before the site is adopted via a Section 38 Agreement.

4.21. In some circumstances, depending on the location of a development site and the availability of local amenities and services, it may be required for a development proposal to promote both Car-Free and Car Light approaches within different parts of a site. Such an approach would need to be supported with an evidence-based mapping exercise (Refer to Appendix B Walking Distances to Services Mapping Methodology).

4.22. All residential developments must provide active on-plot charging points for electric vehicles and e-bikes. Off-plot residential parking areas must be provided with at least 25% (with a minimum of two) active charging points for all parking spaces.

4.23. The overall masterplan of a development proposal must incorporate inclusive mobility measures into the design, specifically considering people with impaired mobility, with allocated spaces located near entrances and providing level access. Inclusive cycling provisions should be provided in accordance with relevant standards.

4.24. A robust travel plan for a development site must be in place with a fixed monitoring period. Such a plan is required to ensure the effeteness of the Car Light measures that have been implemented are influencing travel behaviour

Car Clubs

4.25. Promoting a site wide car club is a concept OCC encourages. Car clubs can be provided on-site, and alongside other initiatives, to reduce car ownership levels and parking levels.

4.26. Developers are expected to work with OCC and the local planning authority to bring forward such parking solutions into areas of public realms as part of a master planning process. This may involve dedicated on-street car parking spaces being allocated on the carriageway or being provided within local community facilities, such as local shopping centre, public car park, church, or leisure centre. Electrical vehicle charging infrastructure should be provided in such locations; subject to appropriate licences and maintenance agreements with OCC for such equipment being placed within the public highway.

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Electrical Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

4.27. Policy EVI 8 of Oxfordshire's Electrical Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (adopted March 2021 Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy) and Policy 29 of the adopted LTCP requires the provision of electrical charging points at homes, workplaces, and key destinations.

4.28. For all residential developments, active (live) on-plot charging points for electric vehicles and e-bicycles are to be provided. Off-plot residential car parking provisions i.e. a privately maintained parking area is to be provided with at least 25% (with a minimum of two) active charging points for all parking spaces. Such infrastructure is to be provided in accordance with the Autonomous and Electric Vehicles Act (2018), Building Regulations Document S, and the governments ambitions on 'Smart EV Charging'.

4.29. 'Active' charging points for electric vehicles for new non-residential development proposals are to be provided at a minimum level of 25% for all parking spaces with ducting provided at all remaining spaces to 'future proof' such spaces to be upgraded in the future.

Further advice on Oxfordshire's Electrical Vehicle Strategy is available via Electric vehicles | Oxfordshire County Council

Parking for People with Impaired Mobility

4.30. Consideration must be given in the design of a site for the provision and location of spaces for impaired mobility people (Blue Badge Holders). Generally, the spaces should be within the curtilage of the property and have level access to the main pedestrian access. At the least, these parking spaces must be within 50m of the dwelling entrance (Blue Badge Holder range).

4.31. Where developers are proposing to build flats with unallocated off-street parking and the level of mobility impaired residents is unknown then 6% of spaces should be designed and allocated for their use. This level of provision should also be considered for non-residential developments. Such provisions should also be located near to the main pedestrian access to the building and have level access. Reference should be made to Department for Transport's Inclusive Mobility standards.

4.32. A parking bay space should be marked with a British Standard Disabled Symbol to conform to Access to and use of buildings Approved Building Regulation Document M Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

4.33. All development proposals will be expected to promote inclusive cycling, provision for bicycles for disabled people and other needs (such as tricycles, cargo bikes, tandems, mobility scooters and adapted bicycles). Such parking facilities are required to be provided in accordance with LTN 1/20 standards.

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4.34. Buildings specifically for the elderly or mobility impaired people should comply with the relevant higher requirements and standards (as shown in OCC's Street Design Guide Parts 1 and 2).

5.0. Residential Car Parking Standards for Oxford City

5.1. Oxford City has lower car parking standards than the rest of the county as it has lower rates of car ownership and generally has very good accessibility by non-car modes to a wide range of facilities and services. Even within the city there are differing degrees of access to local facilities and public transport with car ownership being lower in the city centre than the outer areas. Oxford City Council has its own transport and parking standards approaches to development, Policies M2, M3 and M5 of Oxford Local Plan 2036. The recently adopted Technical Advice Note 12, dated March 2022 Planning Policy - Technical Advice Notes (TANs) | Planning Policy - Technical Advice Notes (TAN) | Oxford City Council) also supports Policies M3: 'Motor Vehicle Parking' and M5: 'Bicycle Parking' of the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2036. As such the Oxford City Council parking standards have been incorporated into this document and will be implemented appropriately for new development sites proposed in Oxford City.

5.2. These standards are to be treated as maxima, reflecting excellent overall accessibility by non-car modes, and the need to use land efficiently. If a car free approach is not promoted by a development site then shared off-plot parking, combined with on-plot parking will be encouraged where appropriate.

5.3. Development proposals which are considered to have over generous car parking will not be accepted. Equally, proposals with significantly reduced parking may be assessed as unacceptable if this will result in unacceptable parking pressure on existing streets, which cannot be reasonably mitigated. In such circumstances a developer must robustly demonstrate that there is an acceptable level of parking provision provided with no adverse impact to highway safety from indiscriminate parking.

Table 1: Oxford City Council Technical Advice Note 12 - Parking Standards for car-permitted development

Development Type	Parking Provision
Any dwelling	1 space per dwelling to be provided within the development site.
Houses in Multiple Occupation	Parking Standards to be decided by case by case on their merit.
Wheelchair accessible or adaptable houses and flats.	1 space per dwelling to be provided within the curtilage of the dwelling (must be designed in accordance with Part M of Building Regulations).
Retirement Homes	1 space per 2 residents' rooms.
Sheltered/extra care homes	1 space per 2 residents' rooms plus 1 space per 2 staff.

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Nursing Homes	1 space per 3 resident's rooms plus 1 space per 2 staff.
Student accommodation	0 spaces per resident room. Operational parking and disabled parking to be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with Policy H8.
Motorcycle and powered two-wheeler parking	1 space per five dwellings.

6.0. Residential Car Parking Standards for Edge of Oxford City sites

6.1. There are several Local Plan development sites allocated around the edge of Oxford City to support Oxford's unmet housing needs. Master planning these developments and geographically mapping out local facilities, services, pedestrian, cycle connectivity and public transport provisions to understand what will be available to these sites is key to setting the on-site parking provisions for these development sites. As these sites progress a design approach focused on promoting active and sustainable transport planning initiatives will be required, to support OCC's target, to reduce car trips by 2040. With consideration to Oxford City's parking standards and to accord with the 'National Policy Context' of setting parking standards, Table 2 is provided to support the progress of these sites and any future speculative housing proposals located around the edge of the city's boundary.

6.2. For areas of a development that will be located within 600m of frequent (2 buses per hour) public transport services with direct pedestrian and cycle connections, and within 3200m walking distance to a specific range of local amenities and services, a car free approach is required. For development sites and areas of development that do not meet all the criteria requirements identified in paragraph 4.15. a Car Light approach i.e. a reduced level of on-plot car parking will be required where the criteria requirements identified in paragraph 4.17. are met. Such approaches must be supported by an approved site wide master plan, a geographic mapped area of access to existing (and new onsite) local facilities, a robust travel plan (including a fixed monitoring period), high quality pedestrian and cycle infrastructure provided early in the life of the development site, including sufficient and convenient residential and visitor cycle parking to influence travel behaviour away from using the private car. The introduction and implementation of a CPZ, funded by the promoter of the site will also be required.

Table 2: Car Light Parking Standards

6.3. The proposed approach is to provide residential car parking at a level that is equal to or lower than the upper limit standard of Table 3(a); and ensure the location of such parking spaces are provided with designated and secure areas for off plot usage but on-site to discourage regular car use.

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Development Type	Parking Provision
1-2 dwellings	Up to 1 space per dwelling, 50% of total site provision to be provided off-plot within the development site.
3+ bedroom dwelling	Up to 2 spaces per dwelling, 50% of total site provision to be provided off-plot within the development site.
Houses in Multiple Occupation	Parking Standards to be decided by case by case on their merit.
Wheelchair accessible or adaptable houses and flats.	1 space per dwelling to be provided within the development site (within curtilage spaces must be designed in accordance with Part M of the building regulations and off plot spaces shall be accessible in accordance with Equalities Act 2010).
Student accommodation	0 spaces per resident room. Operational parking and disabled parking to be considered on a case-by-case.
Motorcycle and powered two-wheeler parking	1 space per five dwellings.

6.4. **Allocated / Flexible Parking arrangements**. All off-plot car parking spaces are to be designed to be allocated to specific users on request and are to be available on a rented or similar basis. Allocation of car parking spaces may be within a designated parking area within the development site rather than a dedicated, specific space. Such an arrangement provides security for residents while maintaining flexibility and potential for repurposing such areas.

6.5. **Car Clubs and Electric Vehicle Charging**. Car club and car-share spaces are to be provided within the residents' and visitor parking provisions (as described in paragraphs 4.24. to 4.25). This provision must be monitored as part of a development site's travel plan and increased through the conversion of residents / visitor parking spaces as required. This approach is considered appropriate as increased demand for car club spaces is likely to reflect reduced car ownership.

6.6. **Off-Plot Parking Requirements**. It is a requirement that a minimum of 50% of the total car parking spaces of a residential development site are to be provided off-plot. These off-plot facilities may be in the form of a communal parking area or a purposely built building (not on-street).This approach is essential to ensure that a significant number of car parking spaces have the potential / are capable of being re-purposed in the future, providing considerable flexibility for transport and travel behaviour as a site builds out and evolves into a place to live and work.

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6.7. **Accessible Parking and Routes**. All accessible spaces, including those for wheelchairs and other users with impaired mobility, must be provided in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and accord with paragraphs 4.30. to 4.34. of this document. Furthermore, the access routes from these designated spaces to the entrance of each dwelling must be provided in accordance with appropriate accessibility standards, ensuring safe, clear, and convenient access for all users.

6.8. Flats and apartments will generally be treated as standard dwellings. However, when using land efficiently to provide residential dwellings, the parking arrangement for flats / apartments tends to be designed within a parking court / communal style arrangement. In such cases it is strongly recommended that they are controlled by a third-party organisation i.e. a management company on behalf of those who will use the spaces. This approach allows flexibility in specific spaces being allocated to a property, assigning them to a particular group or promoting such spaces as unallocated in appropriate locations.

7.0. Residential Car Parking Standards for all areas of Oxfordshire (other than Oxford City and Edge of City sites)

7.1. The car parking standards for all other areas of Oxfordshire are set out in Tables 3(a) and 3(b) below. These standards have been revised from the 2011 and 2015 provisions to ensure their inclusion in development proposals is simpler to incorporate.

7.2. For developments that will be located within towns (Refer to Appendix A for list of towns and other larger settlements) that are able to access frequent (2 buses per hour) public transport services and have direct pedestrian & cycle connections to amenities and services a car free approach will be required. Such parking reductions must be supported by a robust transport submission with appropriate mitigation measures, that will require the introduction and implementation of a CPZ, funded by the promoter of the site. A Car Light approach with off-plot designated parking provisions, as described in paragraphs 4.17 to 4.21, would be required if the criteria set out is met.

Table 3(a): Town Car Parking Standards for Oxfordshire

Towns	Parking Provision
1–2-bedroom dwellings	Up to 1 space per dwelling to be provided within the development site.
3+ bedroom dwellings	Up to 2 spaces per dwelling to be provided within the development site.
Wheelchair accessible or adaptable houses and flats.	1 space per dwelling to be provided within the development site (within curtilage spaces must be designed in accordance with Part M of the building regulations and off plot spaces shall be accessible in

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	accordance with Equalities Act 2010).
Student accommodation	0 spaces per resident room. Operational parking and disabled parking to be considered on a case-by-case.
Motorcycle and powered two-wheeler parking	1 space per five dwellings.

7.3. It is recognised that for development proposals that are located in rural areas of Oxfordshire, such as villages and hamlets, access to frequent public transport services and high standards of direct pedestrian and cycle connections is not always available (unless it is provided by a new development). This tends to mean that the range of facilities and services expected to accommodate a reduced level of car parking provision is not always possible without causing indiscriminate carriageway parking and highway safety issues. On this basis, the parking standards in Table 3(b) are appropriate to use. When such standards are used a justification will be required within a transport submission.

Table 3(b): Car Parking Standards for the rest of Oxfordshire (Villages & Hamlets)

Rural Oxfordshire	**Parking Provision**
1-bedroom dwelling	Up to 1 space per dwelling to be provided within the development site.
2-bedroom dwelling	Up to 2 spaces per dwelling to be provided within the development site
3 – 4-bedroom dwellings	Up to 2 spaces per dwelling to be provided within the development site
5+ bedroom dwelling	Up to 3 spaces per dwelling to be provided within the development site.

7.4. Flats and apartments will be treated as a standard dwelling for sites located in towns and the rest of Oxfordshire. However, when using land efficiently to provide residential dwellings, the parking arrangement for flats / apartments tend to be designed within a parking court / communal style arrangement. In such cases it is strongly recommended that they are controlled by a third-party organisation i.e. a management company on behalf of those who will use the spaces. This approach allows flexibility in specific spaces being allocated to a property, assigning them to a particular group or promoting such spaces as unallocated in appropriate locations.

Houses of Multiple Occupations (HMO)

7.5. HMOs are a type of development infilling which is becoming increasing more popular for sites within or on the outskirts of Oxford City and towns in Oxfordshire. Such proposals tend to give rise to an increase in parking unless appropriate parking provision is provided. The parking provisions for HMO

proposals that are located within Oxford City will be assessed on their merits. For HMO sites outside the city, where indiscriminate on-street parking is likely to occur, will be required to provide a provision of 0.5 on-plot space(s) per bedroom. Such parking arrangements must be designed for practical use, accessible and be free from on-site obstructions. In addition, OCC will require the local planning authority to impose a planning condition limiting 1 occupant per room to assist in managing the parking requirement of an HMO proposal.

7.6. Transport submissions for HMO proposals must justify the parking provisions to be provided if these are not in accordance with the standards quoted in this document. If an HMO is proposed within an area that is known to have car parking stress and is either not providing any on-plot car parking (car free) or not to a suitable level, robust evidence must be provided to justify why such a proposal will not cause indiscriminate on-street parking and any associated highway safety issues. All such development proposals will be assessed on their merits.

Visitor Car Parking Standards

7.7. Developers are expected to take an approach that is consistent with national research which suggests, *"that no special provision should be made for visitors where at least half of the parking provision associated with the development is unallocated. In other circumstances it may be appropriate to allow for additional demand for visitor parking of 0.2 spaces per dwelling"* (DCL, 2007, Residential Car Parking Research).

7.8. For some residential developments this approach may not necessary be feasible. If this is the case, a maximum visitor parking level of 1 car parking space per every 5 residential units will be considered. Any such proposal will require a justification to be provided as part of a transport submission.

7.9. If a development proposal is larger than 10 or more dwellings, visitor parking should be arranged in clusters and / or evenly spread throughout the site and relate to the development types in that area. In some circumstances for large / strategic housing sites that may include mobility / transport hubs being considered as part of a site wide masterplan. All such spaces are to be unallocated.

7.10. As part of a planning submission, an applicant will be required to provide a schedule of parking provision, detailing the number of allocated and unallocated parking spaces, including those in appropriate garages (see paragraph 4.13. for garage size requirements), as well as details on carpools or other shared vehicles, and electrical charging facilities (both active and passive). Such planning submissions will be expected to explain how the proposed parking provision for the site meets the standards set out in this document and the needs of the development, including how these needs are expected to change in the future.

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8.0. Non-residential Parking Standards for Oxfordshire

8.1. Commercial / employment development proposals (both new and redevelopment opportunities) are required to promote sustainable and active travel behaviour by encouraging employees to travel to their work destination by non-car modes and reduce the number of commuter / commercial car trips on the highway network. This approach is emphasised within OCC's adopted LTCP which supports sustainable travel measures and seeks to reduce the availability of car parking at such sites.

8.2. Since the publication of the previous OCC car parking standards, there has been a change in direction in government policy and more flexible working practices have been established. One of these changes was shifting the responsibility for determining parking standards to individual authorities and indicates that local circumstances should be taken in account when setting such standards, including accessibility of the site, the likely demand for parking, and the viability of the site.

8.3. Developers must undertake a site-specific assessment (as described in paragraph 8.7) demonstrating that efforts to reduce car and commercial vehicle trips have been appropriately explored and seek to balance its operational needs, space requirements, efficient use of land and costs attributed to providing parking.

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8.4. Car parking that is over provided for will not be accepted. For car parking where daily usage is shown to be lower than previously assessed from site-wide monitoring, development sites will be encouraged to repurpose such areas. Repurposing may include conversion of areas for active travel measures or benefit the local community and employees through landscaped / biodiversity improvements.

8.5. For all non-residential development proposals located within Oxford City and town centres in Oxfordshire, the delivery of a car free site is required unless an evidence-based justification is provided as part of a robust transport submission. Such provisions must accord with the criteria as identified in the 'Design Considerations' section of this guidance document.

8.6. Table 4 sets out OCC's non-residential standards on vehicular and cycle parking requirements by land-use class as set out in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 as amended up to 2021. This table sets out the expected **upper limit** of car parking provision that may be acceptable once the steps detailed in paragraph 8.7 have been undertaken to establish the appropriate quantum as related to the development-specific criteria. However, should the assessment described in paragraph 8.7 identify a smaller quantum of provision, this will take precedence over the numbers identified in Table 4. Proposals that simply apply the upper limit in the table below without the required justification will not be accepted.

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Table 4: Non-Residential Parking Guidance for Oxfordshire

Use Class	Vehicular Standards (see supporting text)	Minimum Cycle Standards
City / Town development proposals for all non-residential land uses.	Car Free / Operational use only with supporting evidence.	Standards below apply and are encouraged to be exceeded where practical.
B2 General Industrial.	1 space per 75sqm	1 space per 175sqm for staff and 1 space per 250sqm for visitors.
B8 Storage.	1 space per 300sqm	1 space per 250sqm for staff and 1 space per 500 sqm for visitors.
C1 Hotels.	1 space per bedroom	1 cycle space per 5 car-parking spaces provided.
C2 Residential Care Homes.	Site specific assessment required based on travel plan and operational needs.	0.5 spaces per bedroom available to residents, visitors, and staff.
E Commercial, Business and Services - Shops and retail.	1 space per 30sqm	1 space per 50sqm for staff and 1 space per 50sqm for customers.
E Commercial, food retail (supermarket).	Site specific assessment required based on travel plan and operational needs. If an assessment is not provided 1 space per 30sqm is required.	1 space per 50sqm for staff and 1 space per 50sqm for customers.
E Commercial, Business and Services – Financial and Professional Services.	1 space per 45sqm	1 space per 100sqm for staff and 1 space per 250sqm for visitors.
E Commercial, Business and Services – food and drink (mainly in premises) i.e. restaurants and cafes.	1 space per 10sqm of public floor area	1 space per 4 staff and 1 space per 25sqm for customers.
E Commercial, Business and Services – office, research and development and light industrial process.	1 space per 45sqm	1 space per 100sqm for staff and 1 space per 250sqm for visitors.
E Commercial, Business and Services – Non-residential institutions (medical or health services, creches, day nurseries and centres.	1 space per 4 medical staff, plus 1 space 4 non-medical staff. Plus 1 parking space per consulting, examination, treatment, therapy room & A&E cubicle.	1 space 50sqm or 1 per 30 seats capacity. Plus 1 space 5 per employees.

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Use Class	Vehicular Standards (see supporting text)	Minimum Cycle Standards
E Commercial, Business and Services – Assembly and Leisure (indoor sport, recreation or fitness, gyms).	1 space per 30sqm of public floor area	1 space 50 sqm or 1 per 30 seats capacity. Plus 1 space 5 per employees.
F.1 Non-residential institutions (education, at gallery, museum, public library, public exhibition hall, place of worship, law courts).	Site specific assessment required based on travel plan and operational needs.	Staff provision 1 space per 20 staff. Students; 1 space per 10 students.
F.2 Shop no larger than 280sqm (selling mostly essential foods and at least 1km from another similar shop); community hall, outdoor sport/recreation area, indoor or outdoor swimming pool, skating rink.	1 space per 30sqm of public floor area	1 space per 50sqm for staff and 1 space per 50sqm for customers.
Sui Generis, Public House, wine bar, drinking establishment.	1 space per 10sqm of public floor area	1 space 4 staff and 1 space per 25sqm for customers.
Sui Generis, Hot Food Takeaway.	1 space per 10sqm.	1 space 4 staff and 1 space per 25sqm for customers.
Sui Generis, Cinema, Concert Hall, Bingo Hall, Dance Hall, Live Music venue.	1 space per 30sqm.	1 space per 20sqm for staff plus visitor / customer cycle parking.

8.7. As set out in Table 4, the type of land use will determine the maximum amount of commercial / employment vehicle parking per development site. Should a reduction in parking provision be proposed, each application will be individually assessed on its merits, but must be based on the following criteria:

a) Trip rates (including base and forecast mode shares) associated with the development accounting for the vehicular trip rate reductions in accordance with the requirements set out in OCC's 'Implementing Decide & Provide: Requirements for Transport Assessments' document,
b) The policies in OCC's LTCP, notably the transport user hierarchy (Policy 1), which requires that development proposals give primacy to walking, cycling and public transport, and the LTCP targets to reduce dependence on the private car,
c) The specific user group of employees / visitors of the site (including shift patterns),
d) Location and risk of displaced parking.

8.8. The number of spaces for operational vehicles i.e. Light Goods Vehicles (LGV) and Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGV) may also be calculated using the same methodology above or compared to vehicle operating licences for similar buildings / operations.

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8.9. While non-residential developments are expected to provide a minimum level of active charging points (25% of all vehicle parking spaces), in designing this type of infrastructure, there is a need to consider the likely parking behaviour i.e. expected duration of people's stays which may affect the number of 'active' spaces. In designing provisions for disabled users parking at non-residential developments, where the total number of parking spaces exceeds 200 spaces, consideration must be given to providing less than 6% of spaces for disabled parking to ensure there is not overprovision of spaces. Disabled cycle parking is to be provided in accordance with LTN 1/20.

8.10. The developer of a site proposal is responsible for ensuring high quality facilities are provided on site for the proposed use, including secure and overlooked cycle parking (see Design Considerations, paragraph 4.12.), staff changing, washing and storage facilities.

8.11. Any planning submission must be supported with details of the site's operation once it is in use, whether the site stores vehicles not in use, the frequency of vehicles visiting the site for deliveries, or the type and size of vehicles using the site. The majority of such details would be expected to be provided as part of transport submission for a future planning application and accompanying Travel Plan Transport Development Management (TDM) | Oxfordshire County Council

8.12. As part of any planning application submission, the staff and visitor ratio for each land use should be clearly identified as they are likely to be distinct to each land use class and may change over the life of the building, particularly if occupied by another business user. For example, land uses such as retail uses (E Commercial, Business and Services - shops) and health centres/leisure uses (E Commercial, Business and Services, Assembly and Leisure (indoor sport, recreation or fitness, gyms, and hospitals (class C2)) will generally have two user groups accessing those types of developments, staff/employees, and customers/patients. Another example to consider, such as employment uses, (class B2-B8) will generally only be accessed by staff/employees with occasional visitors. In essence, each development proposal is assessed on its merits due to each land-use having its own unique characteristics.

8.13. In addition to the above, other characteristics of non-residential developments needs to be taken into consideration when determining parking arrangements, such as:

a) The geographical location of the site and the levels of accessibility for non-car mode users.
b) Survey (or business) data to determine the peak parking period and demand.
c) Local on-street parking conditions; and
d) Local data i.e. census travel to work data about mode share and supporting Travel Plan information.

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9.0. Parking Capacity (Beat) Surveys

9.1. The information provided in this section of this document is to assist developers and their consultant team when assessing the parking implications of new development for a transport submission (Transport Assessment or Statement) to accompany a planning application. The guidance seeks to ensure that any parking capacity surveys undertaken are robust and that the information collected and presented is in a consistent and concise manner, providing a reliable source of data for decision making purposes.

9.2. Parking capacity surveys are required to satisfy the criteria outlined in this guidance and should be agreed with OCC as part of a scoping exercise for a transport submission. Such surveys should only be undertaken when it is reasonably expected that parking will take place on existing streets and should follow calculation of the expected levels of vehicle ownership and consider how this parking can be provided. Any surveys undertaken will be expected to be presented in the form of a summary report as part of a wider transport submission.

9.3. The survey area is expected to centre on the development site and extend 200 metres (not as the crow flies) for residential uses and 500 metres for commercial uses and is to extend where a 200-metre route is close to joining another and include areas that are most likely to be used for parking by those living in, or visiting the site and will, therefore, need to consider site access arrangements.

9.4. These parking surveys are to be undertaken when usage / demand of available parking is at highest i.e. peak times in the agreed survey area. Where commercial parking is considered, a number of surveys should be undertaken during the operational times for the proposed use, while residential parking demand is to be undertaken when the majority of residents would be expected to be at home i.e. 00:30-05:30. A development that is expected to have large impact on on-street parking in an area where demand is high, may be required to undertake an extensive survey throughout the day.

9.5. A parking capacity survey is generally undertaken as a beat survey (also known as Lambeth Methodology survey) where an enumerator walks an agreed route at regular intervals recording the registration details of parked vehicles. The information expected to be collected should include the following:

a) The rate of turnover of vehicles on each street expressed as a number of vehicles leaving / arriving per hour.
b) The number of vehicles parking on each street; and
c) An estimate of the parking capacity of each street and an explanation of how this is calculated.

9.6. If the development site is located within a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ), the summary report to be provided should also include the details of the existing resident permit take-up or any waiting lists. The summary report should also be accompanied with a map of the area surveyed, details of the date and times

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when a survey was undertaken, and any parking restrictions imposed in the survey area.

9.7. When the results of a parking survey are being prepared, a summary report of the capacity surveys is to be provided and should be accompanied by:

a) A suitable scaled map displaying the geographical area that has been surveyed.
b) Details of the dates and times of day the survey(s) took place.
c) The details of any parking restrictions imposed within the study area; and
d) Confirmation that the study area has been agreed with OCC officers before any survey(s) have been undertaken.

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11.0 Reference Documents

- Oxfordshire County Council Strategic Plan 2025 – 2028 OCC Strategic Plan 2025 to 2028.
- Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (adopted July 2022) Connecting Oxfordshire | Oxfordshire County Council.
- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) dated February 2025 National Planning Policy Framework (publishing.service.gov.uk).
- Oxfordshire County Council Street Design Guide Street Design Guide Part 1 & 2 (oxfordshire.gov.uk).
- Oxfordshire's Electrical Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (Adopted March 2021) Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy.
- Oxfordshire Cycling Design Standards 2017 cyclingstandards (oxfordshire.gov.uk).
- Transport for New Developments Parking Standards for New Residential Developments dated December 2011.
- Manual for Streets published 2007 by the Department of Transport Communities and Government.
- Manual for Streets 2 published in 2010 by the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation.
- Local Transport Note 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design Cycle infrastructure design (LTN 1/20) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).
- Oxford City Technical Advice Note 12, dated March 2022 Planning Policy - Technical Advice Notes (TANs) | Planning Policy - Technical Advice Notes (TAN) | Oxford City Council).
- West Sussex County Council Guidance in Parking at New Developments (September 2020) Guidance on Parking at New Developments (westsussex.gov.uk).
- Surrey County Council Vehicular and Cycle Parking Guidance (January 2018) Parking Guidance for Development January 2018 (woking.gov.uk)
- Buckinghamshire County Council, Buckinghamshire Countywide Parking Guidance (September 2015) parking-guidance-september-2015-2.pdf (buckscc.gov.uk).
- Office of National Statistics Home - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk).
- BREAM UK New Construction BREEAM non-domestic manual - Cover (bregroup.com)
- Building Regulations 2010: Approved Document S: Infrastructure for the charging of electric vehicles Approved Document S: Infrastructure for the charging of electric vehicles (publishing.service.gov.uk).

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Appendix A list of towns and other larger settlements

- Abingdon-on-Thames
- Banbury
- Bicester
- Burford
- Carterton
- Charlbury
- Chipping Norton
- Didcot
- Faringdon
- Grove
- Henley-on-Thames
- Kidlington
- Thame
- Wallingford
- Wantage
- Watlington
- Witney
- Woodstock

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Appendix B Walking Distances to Services Mapping Methodology

This methodology, which is loosely based on the Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL), is for measuring walking distances to services using a 100m-by-100m grid.

1. Documents Needed:

- Excel spreadsheet with the following columns: Grid Reference Number, Distance and additionally a column for Car Free or Car Light if applicable
- Evidence document for screenshots of distances for future reference

Northfield	Boots Pharmacy	The Leys Health Centre	CF or CL
1	2700	2500	CL
2	2800	2600	CL
3	2500	2300	CL
4	2600	2400	CL
5	2700	2500	CL
6	2100	1900	CL
7	2200	2000	CL
8	2300	2100	CL
9	2400	2200	CL
10	2500	2300	CL

Figure 1 Excel Spreadsheet Set Up Example

- Map/ picture of your site with a numbered 100m by 100m grid overlayed

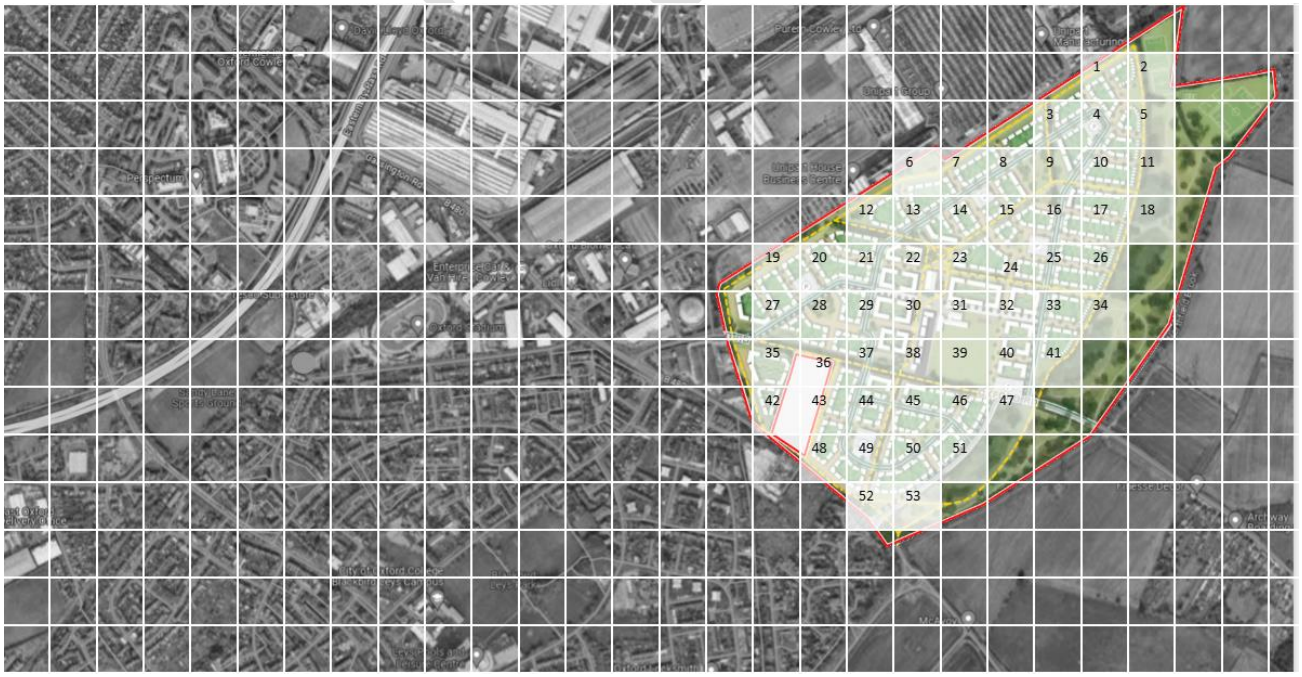


Figure 2 Example Site

2. Measuring distances to services

2.1 Base Grid Reference

- Record name and location of service measuring to/from. The locations of each destination should be agreed with Oxfordshire County Council officers prior to undertaking this task
- Work out 'base grid reference/s' to measure to. This is normally best if it is the closest to the service and at the edge of the site. It may be help with the accuracy to have more than one 'base grid reference' especially if the site is large or there are various points of access from the surrounding roads. In your Excel spreadsheet record what square you are using as the 'base grid reference'
- As below, using the existing footways where possible measure the distance from the service to the centre of your base grid reference. The best way of doing this is by selecting your service in Google Maps then use the journey planner to measure the distance. This ensures the route to the 'base grid reference/s' uses the quickest direct walking route
- Record with snipping tool the distances you are measuring and save these in your evidence document

The example below demonstrates measuring the distance to base grid reference 35 (highlighted orange) from Boots Pharmacy to a site.

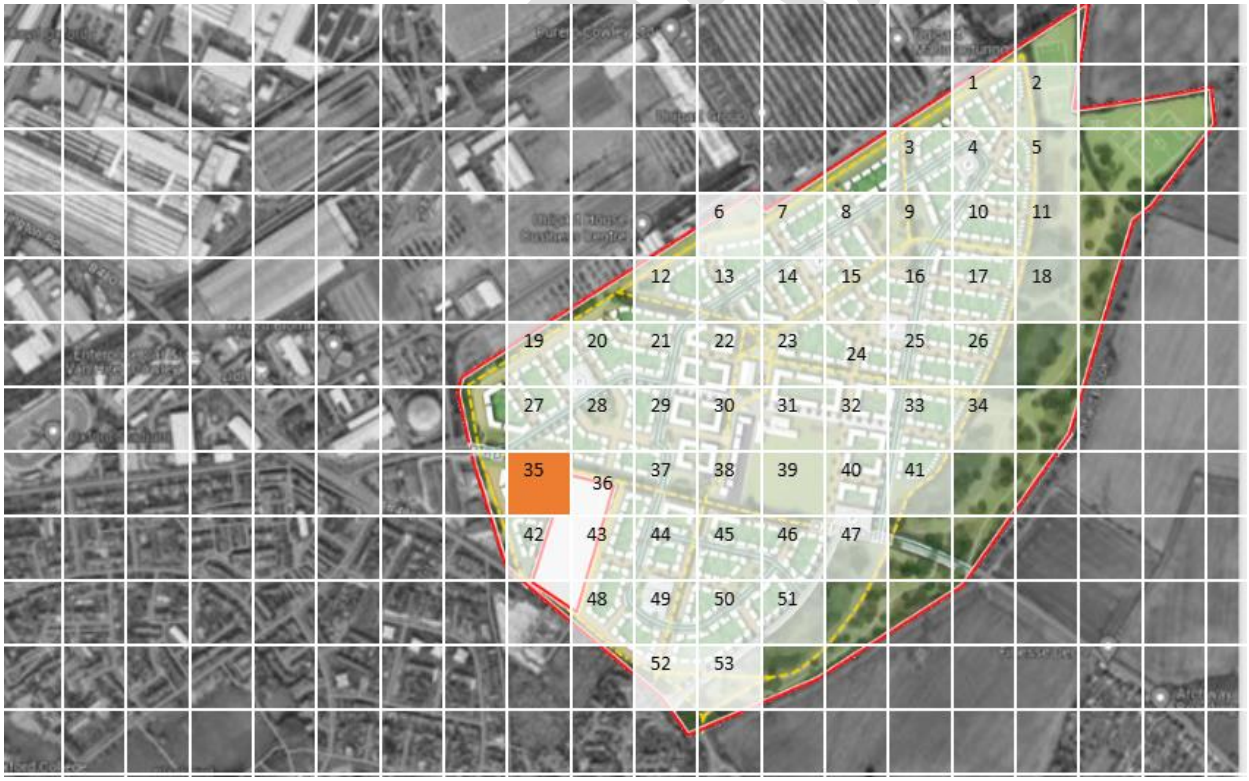


Figure 3 Example Site with highlighted base grid reference

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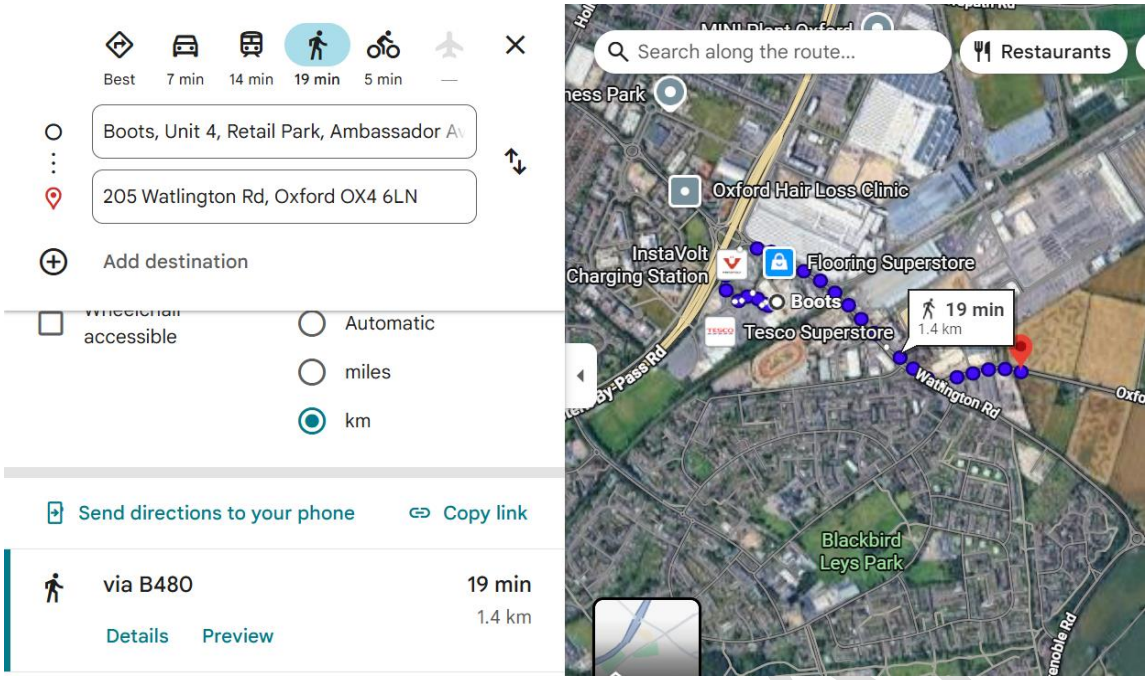


Figure 4 Measuring the distance from Boots Pharmacy to Example Site



Figure 5 Distance from Boots Pharmacy to Example Site

2.2 Measuring the rest of the site

- Each grid represents 100m by 100m, so using your initial base grid references you can use this first measurement to work out the distances to each of the remaining grids
- Using Figure 3 as an example: The distance to grid 35 was 1400m so therefore 36 would be 1500m, 37 1600m etc. The route can be horizontal, vertical or diagonally across the site. So, 27 would be 1500m as would 28.

- It is a good idea to sense check measurements as you go along using the route planner on Google Maps and adding in base grid references as necessary

3. Car Free or Car Light

- If applicable, once all measurements have been recorded you can now record whether the distance recorded means that each grid is Car Free or Car Light.

Notes:

- This methodology assumes that the internal footways within the site are not known. The distances within the site are measured using straight line distances. However, the distance to the site from the services should take into account footways, entrances to the services etc. This is why it is a good idea to use Google Maps route planner rather than the measure distance tool.
- A more detailed updated methodology should be used when the footways are known.
- Before deciding base grid references it is a good idea to look at the surrounding area to the site including what current roads have footways and what pedestrian access there is to the site.

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Parking Standards for New Developments: Walking Distances Review
February 2026

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Introduction

This paper explores the walking distance criteria for car free development in the current Parking Standards for New Development (2022) and considers, through a review of various sources of research, whether there is suitable justification for this criteria to be revised in the proposed updates to the parking standards in the context of both car free development and the new proposals for Car Light development.

Implementing 'Decide & Provide': Requirements for Transport Assessments (3.3 Proximity and Connectivity Metrics for New Developments) states that "To identify multi-modal trip rates for the 'do-minimum' scenario for proposed residential development, an assessment is required of which services are accessible within a round trip of 20-minutes' walk (i.e. 10 minutes each way) based on walking routes and not as the crow flies.". [1] This distance is reiterated in the Parking Standards for New Developments in reference to one of the four criteria needed for a car free (and now Car Light) development.[2] The LTCP also includes this distance as part of Policy 13's Liveable Neighbourhoods.[3]

[1] Oxfordshire County Council. Implementing 'Decide & Provide': Requirements for Transport Assessments: Annex 1_OCC_Implementing Decide and Provide_updated final draft_Dec 25.pdf
[2] Oxfordshire County Council. Parking Standards for New Developments: https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/PARKINGS.PDF
[3] Oxfordshire County Council. Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022 – 2050: https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-connecting-oxfordshire/LocalTransportandConnectivityPlan.pdf

The services identified in the Decide and Provide document as being within a 20-minute walk are:

- Primary School
- Secondary School
- Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)
- Healthcare provision (e.g. GP surgery or pharmacy)
- Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)

The criteria for a car free development also includes a 400m direct walking distance to frequent (15-20 minutes) public transport services.

The 20-minute walking distance referenced in Implementing Decide and Provide, OCC's Parking Standards and the LTCP all take a 20-minute return journey to equate to an 800-metre distance (from the centre of the site). This must be based on available walking routes as opposed to a radius.[4]

However, since the adoption of these standards, OCC officers have observed that these current stipulations are potentially overly restrictive, resulting in few locations being considered appropriate for car-free development. As such, this report explores the available research on how far people are likely to walk to different services, so that these thresholds may be revised whilst ensuring that car-free (and Car Light) development is only required when there are reasonable alternatives available to using a car.

The Implementing Decide and Provide document references the Town and Country Planning Association's (TCPA) (2021) paper on 20-minute neighbourhoods. This in turn references the Victoria State Government's strategies and initiatives page on 20-minute neighbourhoods.[5] However, the original research behind the Australian 20-minute neighbourhoods strategy does not provide specific evidence to justify the 800m distance used.

There is no common definition for the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods with branding and implementation varying from place to place.[6] Several definitions are used in the UK:

- Sustrans (now Walk Wheel Cycle Trust)[7]: 'the concept of having all your basic needs – shops, health centres, work hubs, places to socialise – within a 20-minute walk, cycle or wheel is core to creating liveable cities and towns for

[4] See Notation 1
[5] Victoria State Government. 20-minutue neighbourhoods research and resources. https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/20-minute-neighbourhoods/20-minute-neighbourhood-research-and-resources
[6] O' Gorman and Dillon-Robinson, 2021. 20 Minute Neighbourhoods in a Scottish Context. https://www.climatexchange.org.uk/publications/20-minute-neighbourhoods-in-a-scottish-context/
[7] Sustrans., 2020.What is a 20-mintue neighbourhood. https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/what-is-a-20-minute-neighbourhood/

everyone. More importantly, 20-minute neighbourhoods are key to creating communities.'

- TCPA[8]: 'places in which most of people's daily needs can be met within a short walk or cycle.'
- RTPI[9]: 'one where people have access to the facilities and services, they need within walking distance'

Most notable 20-minute neighbourhoods include Portland (Portland Plan)[10] and Melbourne (Plan Melbourne, 2017-2050)[11] as of 2020, 33 cities worldwide have adopted the concept.[12]

Not all available research/definitions ties in 20-minute neighbourhoods with the 800m walking distance. Furthermore, 20-minute neighbourhoods include more than simply services being within a 20-minute return walk. Although walkability is a key component of 20-minute neighbourhoods these 'liveable communities' also include a wider range of features (see Figure 1). An important objective of the 20-minute neighbourhood concept is to better align spatial and urban planning with transport planning (transport infrastructure), to make it easier for people to walk, cycle and use public transport.[13]

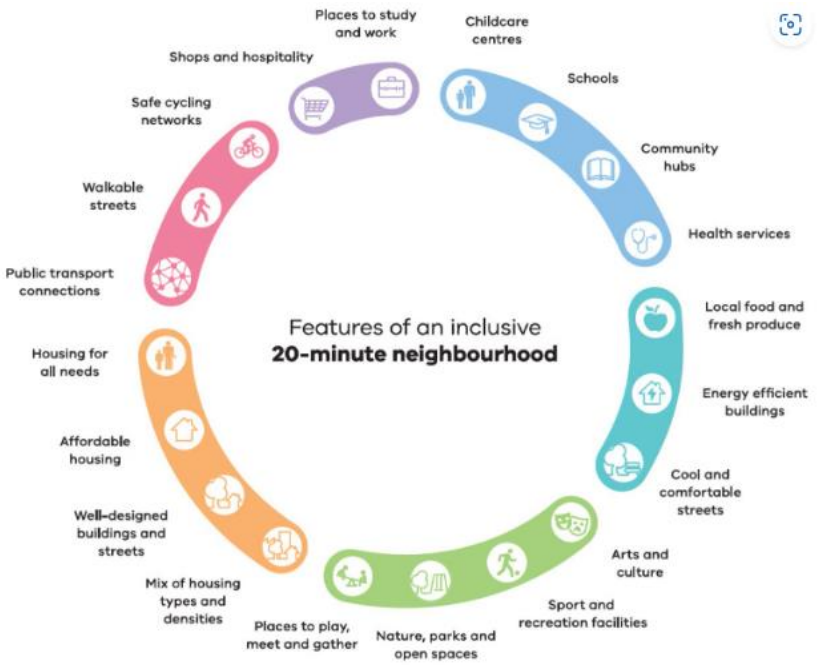


Figure 1 Features of a 20-Minute Neighbourhood (Source: Victoria State Government)

[8] TCPA., The 20-minute neighbourhood.https://www.tcpa.org.uk/collection/the-20-minute-neighbourhood/

[9] Nick Wright and RTPI.,2021. 20-minute neighbourhoods and local place plans – new tools for a healthier, greener Scotland. https://www.rtpi.org.uk/blog/2021/january/20-minute-neighbourhoods-local-place-plans-new-tools-for-a-healthier-greener-scotland/

[10] The Portland Plan. 2012. Portland Government. https://www.portland.gov/bps/planning/about-bps/portland-plan

[11] Figure 1. Plan Melbourne. 2017-2050. Victoria State Government. https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/plan-melbourne

[12] Husam, AW., Cooper, I. 2023 Unpacking the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods. Open House International. https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/unpacking-the-concept-of-20-minute-neighbourhoods-disentangling-d/

[13] See Notation 7

Other documents that use the 20-minute/800m distance include:

- The National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021[14]
- Chartered Institution Highways and Transportation, Planning for Walking, 2015[15]

Overview: How far do people walk?

'How far do people walk?', a paper presented at the PTRC Transport Practitioners' Meeting in 2015[16], analysed the National Travel Survey (NTS) to obtain average and 85th percentile for journeys where walking is the main mode of travel and where walking is the first stage of a public transport trip. The distances are shown in Figure 2 below. The paper states that (p.2):

> When assessing the accessibility of a new development on foot we suggest that the 85th percentile distance should be used to estimate the distance up to which people are prepared to walk. For new bus stops and railway stations, we suggest that the average walking distance is used for planning purposes.

	Mean (m)	85th Percentile (m)
Walk – As main mode of travel		
UK (Excluding London)	1,150	1,950
London	1,000	1,600
Walk to a Bus Stop		
UK (Excluding London)	580	800
London	490	800
Walk to a Railway Station		
UK (Excluding London)	1,010	1,610
London	740	1,290

Figure 2 Walk as Main Mode of Travel Mean (m) and 85th Percentile (m) to Public Transport (Source: Wakenshaw and Bunn, 2015)

The destination of the walking journey is a determining factor in how far people will walk.[17] Associations between destinations and walking have been reported in many countries (including the United Kingdom)[18] on a number of indicators including: the

[14] The National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide
[15] Chartered Institution Highways and Transportation, Planning for Walking, 2015. https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4465/planning_for_walking_-_long_-_april_2015.pdf
[16] Figure 2. Wakenshaw, G and Bunn, N., 2015. How far do people walk?. Presented at the PTRC Transport Practitioners Meetings. https://new.sthelens.gov.uk/media/331745/cd-2229-wyg_how-far-do-people-walk.pdf
[17] King, T, Bentley, R, Thornton, L and Kavanagh, AM.,2015. Does the presence and mix of destinations influence walking and physical activity. International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition (12) 115. https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-015-0279-0
[18] See Notation 17

presence of destinations within walking distance of home[19], proximity to destinations[20], and density of destinations.[21] Increased accessibility to destinations is known to have positive associations with walking behaviours.[22] Other researchers have observed that walking is more likely to be influenced by the type and mix of destinations than simply the presence of destinations.[23]

Walking journeys can also form part of multi modal journeys/ trip chaining which can impact how far people are willing to walk to access certain services. Research into walking distances is based on self-reported distance, tracked distance, or modelling.

Much of the academic research on walking speed is concerned with health and health conditions.[24] These studies may use observed, non-naturalistic walking such as treadmill walking. Furthermore, depending on sample size and purpose of study research may exclude children, those accompanying them, as well as people using walking aids. As shown in one frequently cited paper on average walking speed in 31 countries.[25]

Research into walking distances also uses self-reported and tracked distances. The National Travel Survey (NTS) is a household survey of personal travel by residents in England with data collected through interviews and a 7-day travel diary.[26] The latest available NTS data is taken from 2024 with the below findings:

- 29% of trips were made by walking representing 4% of total distance travelled in 2024
- Walking trips averaged to 18 minutes per trip
- Where more than one transport mode is used within trips, 60% of these trips began with walking in 2024, and 64% of public transport trips using more than one mode started with walking
- Nearly all walks recorded in the NTS were under 5 miles in 2024 (99.8%)
- Most trips to and from school for trip length of under 1 mile were made by walking (83% for children aged 5 to 10 and 92% for children aged 11 to 16)
- Average walking distance travelled was the highest on record since 2002 with 230 miles per person

[19] McCormack, G, Giles-Corti,B and Bulsara,M. 2008. The relationship between destination proximity, destination mix and physical activity behaviours. Preventative Medicine 46 (1). https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0091743507000436
[20] Handy, S, Cao, X and Mokhtarian, P. 2007. Self-selection in the relationship between the built environment and walking: Empirical evidence from Northern California. Journal of American Planning Association. 72. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944360608976724
[21] https://doi.org/10.4278%2F0890-1171-18.1.74
[22] Vernez,A., 2006. Operational Definitions of Walkable Neighbourhood: Theoretical and Empirical Insights. Human Kinetics Journals. 3. https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/jpah/3/s1/article-pS99.xml
[23] Cerin, E., 2007. Destinations that matter: Associations with walking transport. Health and Place. 13 (3). https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1353829206000761?via%3Dihub
[24] Living Street (Scotland).,2023. 20 Minute Neighbourhoods A Community Perspective. https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/ghkbr3zy/20-minute-neighbourhoods.pdf
[25] Levine, R. V., & Norenzayan, A. (1999). The pace of life in 31 countries. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 30(2), 178–205. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1999-10414-003
[26] Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024

- In 2024, females of all ages made more walking trips on average and walked a greater distance than males, with the age group 30 to 39 making the most walking trips with 355 trips per person
- The most common purpose for walking trips in 2024 was just walk (32%). This was followed by education or escort education (18%), shopping (18%) and leisure (16%)
- Despite an increase in the average number of walking trips compared to 2019, and noticeable changes in the proportions in the previous five years, the most common walking trip purposes were the same in 2024 and 2019

Academic research specifically looking at average walking distances is surprisingly sparse however the available studies have found different distances depending on services or destinations being accessed. GIS analysis into walking frequency and physical activity in 50 urban areas in metropolitan Melbourne used seven types of destinations within three network buffer zones (400m, 800m, and 1200m). Finding that[27]:

- At 1200m all destination types were positively associated with walking frequency, and physical activity sufficiency
- For the 800m buffer: all destinations except transport stops and sports facilities were significantly associated with physical activity, while all except sports facilities were associated with walking frequency.
- At 400m, café/takeaway food stores and transport stops were associated with walking frequency and physical activity sufficiency, and sports facilities were also associated with walking frequency.
- Strongest associations for both outcomes were observed for community resources and small food stores at both 800 m and 1200 m.

The Department for Transport publishes journey time statistics from where people live to key local services in England.[28] These statistics are designed to represent 'idealised' (or realistic) journeys which are completed at the following times:

- A Tuesday in the second week October of the year to which they relate
- During the 'morning' peak between 7am to 10am

Across a range of 8 key local services in England, the average minimum journey times to access the services from where people live are:

- 10 minutes by car
- 16 minutes by cycle
- 18 minutes by public transport or walking
- 28 minutes by walking only

For those key services which are 'delivered' from the largest number of locations, journey times on average are shorter. Small employment centres (100 to 499 jobs), primary schools, and food stores have the shortest journey times, whereas the longest

[27] See Notation 17
[28] Figure 3,4, 6 Department for Transport., 2021. Journey Time Statistics, England: 2019. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/journey-time-statistics-england-2019/journey-time-statistics-england-2019

average journey times are observed for hospitals and for large employment centres. In locations where there are the largest numbers of services, the variation between journey times by mode tend to be smaller. However, where there are fewer services available, there is a greater variation between modes, highlighting the relative travel time advantage of car travel to these locations.

Service	Car	Cycle	Public Transport or walking	Walking
Employment (100 to 499 jobs)	7	9	9	11
Employment (500 to 4999 jobs)	8	10	11	15
Employment (5000 or more jobs)	16	30	31	58
Primary School	7	9	9	9
Secondary School	10	14	18	26
Further Education	11	17	21	34
GP	8	11	13	18
Hospital	20	37	41	75
Food Store	7	9	9	11
Town Centres	11	17	20	37

Figure 3 Average Minimum Travel Time (Minutes) to Nearest Service by Key Service and Mode of Transport, England 2019. (Source: Department for Transport, 2019)

Urban areas typically have lower minimum travel times across all services and modes of transport. Furthermore, urban areas have lower variation across the 4 modes, with the average minimum travel time to key services ranging between 9 and 22 minutes, compared to between 14 and 55 minutes in rural areas. Figure 4 suggests a relative journey time advantage of travel by car in rural areas, and also that the comparative difference between urban and rural average minimum journey times to all key services is lowest for car journeys.

Area	Car	Cycle	Public transport or walking	Walking
Urban	9	13	15	22
Rural	14	27	30	55

Figure 4 Average Minimum Travel Time, minutes, to all key services, by urban and rural area and mode of transport, England, 2019. (Source: Department for Transport, 2019)

Health, fitness and disability also impact how far people are willing or able to walk to access services or for leisure.[29] Martin et al (1988) estimated that 6.2 million adults could not walk 400 yards without a rest, and 3.4 million could not walk 200 yards without stopping or severe discomfort. [30]

[29] Activity Alliance.,2018. The Activity Trap: Disabled People's Fear of Being Active. https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/002/433/Activity_Alliance_-_The_Activity_Trap_full_report_Accessible_PDF_FINAL_original.pdf

[30] Martin, Jean, Howard Meltzer and David Elliott. 2015. The prevalence of disability among adults, OPCS surveys of disability in Great Britain, Report 1, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, HMSO London. In https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4465/planning_for_walking_-_long_-_april_2015.pdf

As shown above, walking distances vary depending on the type of service being accessed as well as other factors such as health and disability. The destination (service) of the walking journey impacts how far people walk with longer journeys occurring for larger employers and railway stations. Researchers have observed that walking is more likely to be influenced by the type and mix of destinations than simply the presence of destinations.

Primary and Secondary Schools

Policy:

The Department for Education provides statutory guidance for local authorities on travel to school for children of a compulsory school age. The most recent guidance from 2024 states that the statutory walking distance for children under eight is 2 miles from the child's home and for over eight, 3 miles.[31] These statutory walking distances are used to determine whether a child is eligible for free school travel although there is no expectation that a child could or should walk to school if they live within the statutory distance.[32] The walking route must be measured by the "nearest available route" from where their home property meets the highway to the nearest school gate.[33]

Research:

Taking a five-year average from 2018-2024 (i.e. excluding 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-related impacts), The NTS found that where the trip length was under a mile that 82% of primary school students and 91% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking). Where the trip length was one to two miles, 24% of primary school students and 71% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking, cycling, and bus).

The 2024 National Travel Survey[34] found for children aged 5 to 10:

- 51% of trips to and from school were made by walking in 2024, 43% were by car and 2% by local bus
- Most trips of less than a mile to and from school were made by walking (83%) and the car is used most often for longer trips to and from school, with 73% for trip length 1 to 2 miles, 83% for trip length 2 to under 5 miles and 69% for trip length 5 miles and over in 2024

For children ages 11 to 16:

[31] Department for Education. 2014. Travel to School for Children of Compulsory School Age. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/659d7ebb0dd0a200138b612a/Travel_to_school_for_children_of_compulsory_school_age.pdf
[32] See Notation 31
[33] Road Safety GB., 2021. Assessment of Walking Routes to School. https://roadsafetygb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/RSGB-WRTS-04.21.pdf
[34] Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024 Travel to and from School. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024/nts-2024-travel-to-and-from-school

- 92% trips to and from school for trip length of under 1 mile were made by walking
- 37% of trips to and from school were made by walking, 30% by car and 18% by local bus
- For children aged 11 to 16, the bus is used most often for longer trip lengths, with 42% of trips to and from school by bus for trip lengths 2 to under 5 miles and 58% for trip lengths 5 miles and over

On average English primary school children ages 5-10 live 1.6 miles from school on average compared to 3.7 miles for 11-16 years old.[35] However, the main reason given in the 2024 NTS for not walking to school more often was that the school was too far away.[36] Research into commuting to school in the United Kingdom has found that distance from home to school is the most significant individual level factor associated with being driven to school.[37] Distance being a strong predictor of motorised travel to school is confirmed by findings from international studies on travel to school in the U.S.[38] and Sweden[39].

Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food) and Healthcare provision

Research into how far people walk to supermarkets and GP surgeries (or other healthcare provision, such as a pharmacy) is sparse compared to other services.

The National Travel Survey (2023) found that shopping is the most common reason for travelling but accounts for a smaller share of distance travelled.[40] Forming 19% of trips but only 11% of total distance travelled in 2015.[41] Research has shown that personal and environmental characteristics impact perception of distance to common destinations.[42] One of these destinations is retail with only one third of respondents correctly estimating the amount of time it would take to walk from home to their nearest retail destinations.[43] The National Travel Survey has consistently found that the

[35] Department for Transport., 2013. National Travel Survey: 2013. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2013

[36] Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024 Travel to and from School. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024/nts-2024-travel-to-and-from-school

[37] Easton, S and Ferrari, Ed., 2015. Children's travel to school – the interaction of individual neighbourhood and school factors. Transport Policy. 44. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967070X15300196#bib21

[38] McDonald, N.C.,2008. Children's mode choice for the school trip: The role of distance and school location in walking to school. Transport Policy. 35.https://www.scopus.com/record/display.uri?eid=2-s2.0-36448934484&origin=inward&txGid=030ba2a948d9a6faad803c9cc4a9e0ee

[39]Johansson,k., 2012. Active commuting to and from school among Swedish children - A national and regional study. European Journal of Public Health. 22 (2). https://www.scopus.com/record/display.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84859786625&origin=inward&txGid=dcc65c5ae34d433c928f561bd9f51285

[40] Department for Transport.2023. NTS 2023: Trips by purpose, age, mode and sex. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2023/nts-2023-trips-by-purpose-age-mode-and-sex

[41] Department for Transport., 2023. NTS 2023: Trips by purpose, age, mode and sex. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a829db5e5274a2e8ab58747/why-people-travel-shopping-2015.pdf

[42] Horning, J, El- Geneidy, A and Krizek, K. 2007. Perceptions of Walking Distance to Neighbourhood Retail and Other Public Servies. https://tram.mcgill.ca/Research/Publications/distance_perception.pdf

[43] See Notation 42

majority of shopping trips are made by car with 20% of all car trips made in 2023 being shopping.[44]

The type and price of food shops within walking distance is an important element to consider when looking at walking distances to services. Research has found that more than a million UK residents live in 'food deserts' defined as neighbourhoods where residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious food this is due to a variety of factors including poverty, and poor public transport. [45]

One in ten deprived areas in the UK are food deserts, these include deprived inner-city areas with no large supermarkets leaving residents to shop in smaller convenience stores where food prices are higher and the selection of healthy fresh food may be more limited. [46] This combination can lead to individuals paying a "poverty premium for groceries"[47].Therefore, when looking at walking distances to supermarkets and local grocery shops it is important to consider what the shop sells and the price of fresh food. A lack of accessible public transport routes can limit residents to smaller expensive shops with food deserts most disproportionality affected as they cannot afford or are physically unable to travel to large cheaper supermarkets. [48]

The first study in the UK to investigate proximity to primary care by walking found that 85% of the population is estimated to live within a 20-minute walk of a GP premises. [49] This reduced to 81% in the most affluent areas and increased to 98% in the most deprived areas. A large reduction was seen in rural areas with only 19% of the population in these areas living within a 20-minute walking distance. Needing to travel greater distances to services is common in rural areas making walking a less attractive option. The Statistical Digest of Rural England (2022) indicates that for those living in rural areas the minimum travel time to access GP services is 42 minutes if the journey is made by walking only compared to 13 minutes in urban areas. [50]

[44] Department for Transport.2023. NTS 2023: Car availability and trends in car trips. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2023/nts-2023-car-availability-and-trends-in-car-trips

[45] Butler, P., 2018. More than a million UK residents live in food deserts. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/12/more-than-a-million-uk-residents-live-in-food-deserts-says-study

[46]GMPA., 2018. Food Deserts in the UK. https://www.resolvepoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Food-deserts-in-the-UK.pdf

[47] See Notation 46

[48] Social Market Foundation., 2019. What are the barriers to eating healthily in the UK?. https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/barriers-eating-healthily-uk/

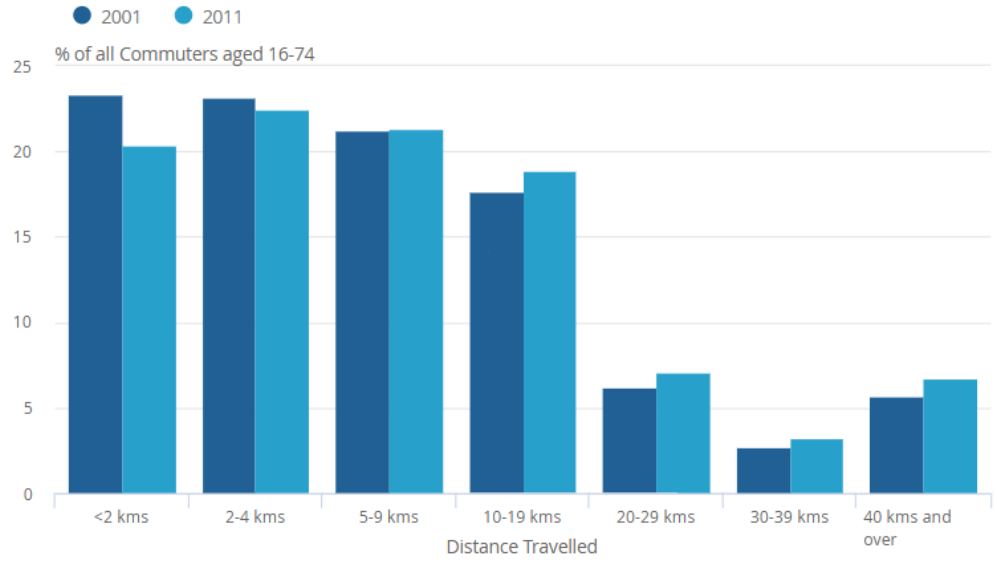
[49] Todd, A, Copeland, A. 2015. Access all areas? An area – level analysis of accessibility to general practice and community pharmacy services in England by urbanity and social deprivation. National Library of Medicine. 8 (5). https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25956762/

[50] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs., 2013. Statistical Digest of Rural England. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/630620558fa8f5536c077dcc/07_Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_2022_August_edition.pdf

Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)

Commuting was the second most common trip purpose recorded in the NTS of 2024 with 111 trips per person. [51] The longest distance travelled on average was also for commuting purposes with 1,007 miles per person recorded in 2024. [52]

In the 2011 census 9.8% of respondents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled to work by walking with 2.8% travelling by cycling.[53] 20% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled less than 2km to a workplace with 23% traveling between 2 and 4km.[54] Please note that the 2011 census has been used as a reference due to the issues resulting from the 2021 census having been conducted during the Covid-related lockdown (see here for more details).



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

Figure 5 Commuting Distances Travelled, UK, 2001 and 2011 Census. (Source: Office for National Statistics, 2011)

[51] Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024

[52] See Notation 51

[53] Office for National Statistics. The National Archives. 2011 (Archived in 2016). 2011 Census Analysis - Method of Travel to Work in England and Wales Report. https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20160105224318/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/method-of-travel-to-work-in-england-and-wales/art-method-of-travel-to-work.html#tab-Commuting-by-all-other-modes-of-transport

[54] Figure 5. Office for National Statistics. 2011. Commuting to work, Changes to Travel to Work Areas: 2001 to 2011 https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/commutingtoworkchangestotraveltoworkareas/2001to2011#:~:text=An%20illustration%20of%20the%20increase,from%2032.3%25%20to%2035.8%25.

Research has found that most people in England could not get to work without motorised modes of transport. [55] Modelling the capacity of individuals to complete their journeys using factors such as bicycle availability and levels of active travel found that only 44% of people in England were capable of getting to work by walking or cycling.[56] In contrast, the 2019 Department for Transport accessibility journey time statistics states that the average minimum journey to employment by walking is:[57]

- 11 Minutes for Employment 100-499 jobs
- 15 Minutes for Employment 500-4999 jobs
- 58 Minutes for Employment 5000 or more jobs

Smaller employment centres have shorter walking journey times whereas hospitals and large employment centres have the lowest average journey times. This is due to the number of these services available to be included in the accessibility study with 17,457 small employment centres and 843 large employment centres. Figure 6 shows the percentage of service users able to access employment within given times by walking. 83% to 70% can access smaller and medium employment centres by walking for 15 minutes falling to only 13% for large employees and only 3% for hospitals.

Public Transport Services



Figure 6 Percentage of service users able to access each key service within given times, by walking, England, 2019 (Source: Department for Transport, 2019)

The power of destination affecting walking distances is particularly evident in acceptable walking distances to public transport. For bus stops in residential areas 400m has often been regarded as a cut-off and in town centres 200m.[58] Whereas people will walk up to 800m to get to a railway station. This is reflective of the perceived quality and importance of rail services. [59]

Planning for Public Transport in New Development (The Institution of Highways and Transportation 1999) advises that “New developments should be located so that public transport trips involving a walking distance of less than 400m from the nearest bus

[55] University of Leeds., 2015. Study finds only 44% of people in England capable of getting to work by walking or cycling. https://www.leeds.ac.uk/news/article/3746/
[56] See Notation 55
[57] See Notation 28
[58] Department for Infrastructure.,2000 (updated 2019). Creating Places: Achieving Quality in Residential Environments. https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/creating-places-achieving-quality-residential-environments
[59] CIHT., 2015. Planning for Walking. https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4465/planning_for_walking_-_long_-_april_2015.pdf

stop or 800m from the nearest railway station"[60] advice which was then widely adopted by Local Authorities. [61] Multiple planning and policy documents adopt the 400m walking distance to a bus stop and 800m distance to a railway station however the reason why is not clear. [62]

How far do people walk? An analysis of the National Travel Survey found that: [63]

- Buses are mainly used for the purpose of commuting, followed by leisure and shopping purposes
- The average walking distances to a bus stop for commuting, education and leisure are similar at just over 600m. However, people do not walk as far if on a shopping journey (500m). The 85th percentile for each journey purpose is similar, at 800m, apart from leisure at 1,290m.
- Walking to a railway station is undertaken predominantly for commuting (50%) and leisure (22.3%), these together accounting for over two-thirds of the sample.
- The average walking distances to a rail station for commuting and for leisure are very similar at just over 1,000m, whilst the 85th percentile level is 1,610m.
- The analysis clearly demonstrated that average walking distances to a bus stop exceeds the 400m and to a railway station exceed 800m which has been the distances recommended for use in IHT (1999).

International studies have also found that certain factors such as frequency of bus service and walking route related attributes contribute to the maximum distance travellers are willing to walk. [64] [65] 40% of all public transport journeys in the UK start with a (registered) walking trip. [66]

Summary of Walking Distances

The 20-minute 800m return journey distance cited in Implementing 'Decide & Provide': Requirements for Transport Assessments is based on the distances given in the Town and Country Planning Association's (TCPA) (2021) paper on 20-minute neighbourhoods. This in turn references the Victoria State Government's strategies and initiatives page on 20-minute neighbourhoods. However, it is difficult to find the

[60] The Institution of Highways and Transportation., 1999. Guidelines for Planning for Public Transport in Developments. https://programmeofficers.co.uk/Wirral/CoreDocuments/CD3/CD03.16_CIHT%20guidelines%20for%20planning%20for%20public%20transport%20in%20development%201999.pdf
[61] See Notation 16
[62] See Notation 16
[63] See Notation 16
[64] Van Der Waerden,P, Van Der Waerden, J and Burger,M. 2024. Exploring the role of public transport service and walking route related factors to identify maximum walking distances to bus stops in the Netherlands. Journal of Public Transportation. 26. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1077291X2400016X
[65] Gao, J, Kamphius, C, Helbich, M and Ettema,D. 2020. What is 'neighbourhood walkability'? How the built environment differently correlates with walking for different purposes and with walking on weekdays and weekends. Journal of Transport Geography. 88. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0966692320302556
[66] Basheet, M and Van Der Waerden, P., 2019. Multi-stage trips: An exploration of factors affecting mode combination choice of travellers in England. Transport Policy.81. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0967070X18308515

source of the original research behind the Australian 20-minute neighbourhoods strategy citing an 800m distance.

However, there is a wide range of national and international academic and quantitative research on walking distances. From an initial review this research does suggest that walking distances to certain services could be/should be extended.

Primary and Secondary School

- Statutory guidance for local authorities states that the statutory walking distance for children under eight is 2 miles from the child's home and for over eight, 3 miles.
- Taking a five-year average from 2018-2024 (i.e. excluding 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-related impacts), the NTS found that where the trip length was under a mile that 82% of primary school students and 91% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking). Where the trip length was one to two miles, 24% of primary school students and 71% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking, cycling, and bus).
- This suggests that the walking distance for school travel could be increased to 1 mile (or 1.6km) for primary schools and to 2 miles (or 3.2km) for secondary schools.

Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food) and Healthcare provision (GP Surgery or pharmacy)

- Research into how far people walk to supermarkets and GP surgeries is sparse compared to other services.
- The National Travel Survey has consistently found that the majority of shopping trips are made by car with 20% of all car trips made in 2023 being shopping.
- The first (and only?) study in the UK to investigate proximity to primary care by walking found that 85% of the population is estimated to live within a 20-minute walk of a GP premises. However, there were large variations for rural areas.
- There does not appear to be the research necessary to comment definitively on whether an 800m distance could be increased for supermarket or local grocery shops. Travel by car to shops would likely take into account the size and location of the shop being accessed e.g., out of town retail location versus local convenience store but data is not available at this level.
- As most within urban areas live a 20-minute walk from a local GP service it would appear the 800m/20 minute would apply here. Especially considering distance being a barrier to accessing medical services.

Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)

Walking distance to employment varies depending on the size of the site. Larger employment sites with 5000 or more jobs have a high average walking distance at 58 minutes whereas smaller employment sites with 100-499 jobs have a much lower time at 11 minutes. 83% to 70% can access smaller and medium employment centres by

walking for 15 minutes falling to only 13% for large employees and only 3% for hospitals.

The various statistics regarding employment size would suggest that different walking distances could be employed based on size of the employment site.

Public Transport Services

Analysis of travel behaviour has shown that that average walking distances to a bus stop exceed the 400m and to a railway station exceed 800m which has been the distances recommended for use in IHT (1999). The perceived quality of the services as well as other factors affecting the walking route related attributes do impact how far people are willing to walk to access public transport. Investigation into the frequency and type of public transport as well as the walking route one might take from the new development to the various public transport stops would be needed.

Conclusion

This initial review of walking distances to certain services has found that for some services (based on the available research) it would seem that the 800m / 20-minute distance included in Implementing Decide and Provide and the Parking Standards guidance could be increased.
However, the quality and accessibility of the walking routes is crucial to how far people feel they can walk. There is also likely to be gender and age factors involved in walking distances which need to be considered. Although sources of data such as the NTS are useful they may be affected by local variation.

The walking distance criteria for car free development in the adopted standards are as follows:

Car free (adopted standards)	
Destination	**Walking distance**
Primary school	800m
Secondary school	800m
Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)	800m
GP surgery	800m
Employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)	800m
Public transport (15 - 30-minute frequency)	400m

Based on the research cited in this paper, it is proposed that the criteria for when a development should be car-free is changed to the following:

Car free	
Destination	**Walking distance**
Primary school	1,600m
Secondary school	3,200m
Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)	800m
Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy)	1,600m
Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)	3,200m
Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour)	600m
Train station (served by 2 trains per hour)	1000m

The rationale for these revisions is as follows:

Primary school (1,600m)

A five-year average of data from 2018-2024 (excluding 2020 and 2021) from the DfT National Travel Survey shows that 82% of primary school students travel to school by non-car modes where the journey is under a mile.

Secondary school (3,200m)

A five-year average of data from 2018-2024 (excluding 2020 and 2021) from the DfT National Travel Survey shows that 91% of secondary school students travel to school by non-car modes where the journey is under a mile and 71% where the journey is one to two miles.

Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy) (1,600m)

Unlike access to food, education, and work, access to healthcare is less likely to be a daily requirement, so it is deemed appropriate to extend this distance. Furthermore, in a car free area, people will still have very good access to public transport.

Significant area of employment (3,200m)

As most secondary school students walk/bus/cycle up to 2 miles (3,200m) to school, most adults can be expected to travel the same distance to work without a car.

Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour) (600m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the mean average walking distance to a bus stop is 580m.

Train station (served by 2 trains per hour) (1,000m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the mean average walking distance to a train station is 1,020m.

Based on the research cited in this paper, it is proposed that the criteria for when a development should be car-lite is the following:

Car Light	
Destination	**Walking distance**
Primary school	1,600m
Secondary school	3,200m
Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)	1,600m
Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy)	3,200m
Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)	3,200m
Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour)	800m
Train station (served by 2 trains per hour)	1,600m

The rationale for the differences between car free and Car Light is as follows:

Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food) (1,600m)

As the majority of school students (both primary and secondary) travel to school by non-car modes where the journey is less than a mile, most adults can be expected to travel the same distance to a supermarket or local grocery shop. Furthermore, in a Car Light area, people will still have very good access to public transport.

Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy) (3,200m)

Unlike access to food, education, and work, access to healthcare is less likely to be a daily requirement. Furthermore, in a Car Light area, people will still have very good access to public transport.

Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour) (800m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the 85th percentile walking distance to a bus stop is 800m.

Train station (served by 2 trains per hour) (1600m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the 85th percentile walking distance to a train station is 1,610m.

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Oxfordshire County Council

Equalities Impact Assessment

UPDATES TO PARKING STANDARDS FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS

DECEMBER 2025

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Section 1: Summary details

Directorate and Service Area	Regulatory Planning & Enforcement, Economy and Place
What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change).	Updates to Parking Standards for New Developments
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	An updated technical document to implement LTCP policy.
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy or proposed service change. Summarise possible impacts. Does the proposal bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community? (following completion of the assessment).	The 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document has been updated to further support Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) approach to parking at new and redeveloped development sites with an overall objective to restrict / reduce on-site car parking at a destination location to influence people's travel behaviour and encourage alternative modes of travel to be used rather than that of the private car. It is to be used to help determine the level of parking at all new developments and provide the basis of OCC's advice to the local planning authorities on development proposals and the soundness of policies related to parking for new developments. This Equalities Impact Assessment shows that there is likely to be a benefit to various individuals, groups, and communities as a result of this technical document being implemented.
Completed By	Michael Deadman, Transport Development Manager
Authorised By	Jamie Kavanagh, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead
Date of Assessment	15th December 2025

Section 2: Detail of proposal

Context / Background Briefly summarise the background to the policy or proposed service change, including reasons for any changes from previous versions.	OCC's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), adopted July 2022, outlines a clear vision to deliver a net-zero Oxfordshire transport and travel system by 2040. One of the policies within LTCP that will be key to this vision is Policy 33, which sets out how the council is seeking to reduce and restrict car parking availability creating more attractive places for residents to live and work in. Parts 'a' and 'b' of Policy 33 requires parking requirements for all modes of transport to be considered, in line with OCC's transport user hierarchy; and embed the parking standards into relevant guidance and decision-making processes, such as planning applications for development proposals. The updated 'Parking Standards for New Developments' document has now been prepared and its formal adoption by Cabinet is recommended in order to allow OCC officers to ensure its requirements are achieved to meet the aims of the LTCP policy. A specific policy to support the parking standard document is also being prepared and will also need to go through a separate LTCP process.
Proposals Explain the detail of the proposals, including why this has been decided as the best course of action.	OCC's LTCP sets out the target of achieving a net-zero transport and travel system by 2040, improving health and wellbeing, tackling the climate emergency, reducing private car usage, and prioritising walking, cycling, and public transport. As detailed in the LTCP, in order to achieve this, changes to the way the council assesses on-site car parking levels for development proposals will need to be made. Such an undertaking will necessarily entail a multi-pronged approach to reshaping the way places are connected. OCC, in its role as the local highway authority, is a statutory consultee in respect of planning considerations that affect the public highway and responds to planning application proposals when consulted by all local planning authorities. OCC provides advice to local planning authorities on the transport implications of development proposals to assist in their decision-making process. OCC is also consulted during the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans and may provide advice on the soundness of policies that relate to parking in new developments (redeveloped) sites. This updated parking standard document has been prepared to outline OCC's approach to parking at new developments with an objective to restrict / reduce on-site car parking at a destination location to influence people's travel behaviour and encourage alternative modes of travel to be used rather than that of the private car. It is to be used to help determine the level of parking at all new developments and provide the

	basis of OCC's advice to the local planning authorities on development proposals and the soundness of policies related to parking for new developments.
Evidence / Intelligence List and explain any data, consultation outcomes, research findings, feedback from service users and stakeholders etc, that supports your proposals and can help to inform the judgements you make about potential impact on different individuals, communities or groups and our ability to deliver our climate commitments.	'Parking Standards for New Developments' is a technical document intended to implement policy in the Oxfordshire LTCP and as such a comprehensive consultation exercise for the adoption of this document in October 2022 was undertaken. Research has been undertaken by liaising and viewing other county council parking standard documents and other related research to assist with this document. In addition, the existing OCC parking standard, Oxfordshire 2011 and 2021 census data for car ownership, national design standards and local infrastructure guidance documents have also been researched to prepare this updated document and are referenced to. An engagement process has been undertaken seeking comments from a focussed group of internal colleagues, officers at the district and city councils, industry professionals, and the authors of the guidance upon which the document is based.

Alternatives considered / rejected Summarise any other approaches that have been considered in developing the policy or proposed service change, and the reasons why these were not adopted. This could include reasons why doing nothing is not an option.	The car and cycle parking standards that OCC has been using when assessing development proposals has been updated to incorporate revised standards while incorporating the guidance provided in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) dated December 2025 and the adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. Previous Local Transport Plans have not typically been supported by supplementary documents intended to ensure the effective implementation of OCC policy, so in that sense doing nothing was previously the option taken. To ensure the updates to this document are robust and legally defensible in planning terms, the reliance on the parking standards as guidance must be underpinned by a formal, adopted statutory policy within the LTCP.

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Protected Characteristics

Protected Characteristic	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Age	☐	☒	☐	By putting greater emphasis on ensuring that new developments contribute to reduced on-site parking provisions, this will aid the council's overall objective to make walking, cycling, and public transport use more attractive making a positive contribution to ensuring that travel choices for all ages are more widely available.	n/a	n/a	n/a
Disability	☐	☒	☐	By putting greater emphasis on ensuring that new developments contribute to reduced on-site parking provisions, this will aid the council's overall objective to make walking, cycling, and public transport use more attractive making a positive contribution to ensuring that travel choices for all ages are more widely available.	n/a	n/a	n/a

Gender Reassignment	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Marriage & Civil Partnership	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pregnancy & Maternity	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Race	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sex	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sexual Orientation	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Religion or Belief	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Community Impacts

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Rural communities	☐	☒	☐	By putting greater emphasis on ensuring that new developments contribute to reduced on-site parking provisions, this will aid the council's overall objective to make walking, cycling, and public transport use more attractive making a positive contribution to ensuring that travel choices for all ages are more widely available (where possible).	n/a	n/a	n/a
Armed Forces	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Carers	☐	☒	☐	By putting greater emphasis on ensuring that new developments contribute to reduced on-site parking provisions, this will aid the council's overall objective to make walking, cycling, and public transport use more attractive making a positive	n/a	n/a	n/a

Additional community impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				contribution to ensuring that travel choices for all ages are more widely available.			
Areas of deprivation	☐	☒	☐	By putting greater emphasis on ensuring that new developments contribute to reduced on-site parking provisions, this will aid the council's overall objective to make walking, cycling, and public transport use more attractive making a positive contribution to ensuring that travel choices for all ages are more widely available.	n/a	n/a	n/a

Section 3: Impact Assessment - Additional Wider Impacts

Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
Staff	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other Council Services	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Providers	☒	☐	☐	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Social Value [1]	☐	☒	☐	By putting greater emphasis on ensuring that new developments contribute to reduced on-site parking provisions, this will aid the council's overall objective to make walking, cycling, and public transport use more attractive making a positive contribution to ensuring that travel choices for all ages are more widely available contributing to the economic,	n/a	n/a	n/a

[1] If the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 applies to this proposal, please summarise here how you have considered how the contract might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the relevant area

Additional Wider Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of Impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner* (*Job Title, Organisation)	Timescale and monitoring arrangements
				social, and environmental well-being of the county.			

Section 4: Review

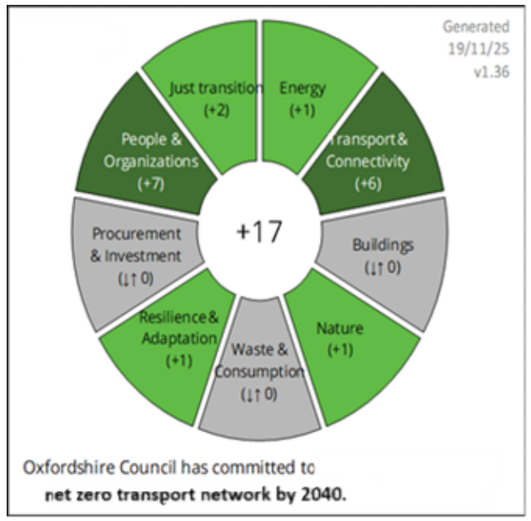
Where bias, negative impact or disadvantage is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review Date	**18 months from adoption date.**
Person Responsible for Review	**Transport Development Manager**
Authorised By	**Head of Regulatory Planning & Enforcement**

Climate Impact Assessment

Summary

Directorate and Service Area	Regulatory Planning & Enforcement, Economy & Place
What is being assessed	Parking Standards for New developments (updated)
Is this a new or existing function or policy?	A new technical document
Summary of assessment	The assessment shows that implementing the updated OCC Parking Standards for New Developments document will help support a positive contribution towards the County Council's aims of addressing the climate and ecological emergency.
Completed by	Michael Deadman
Climate action sign off by	Franco Gonzalez
Director sign off by	
Assessment date	19/11/2025



Detail of proposal

Context / Background	The revised document sets out OCC's requirements for implementing LTCP objctives / targets on promoting reduced car parking levels at new developments as part of an approach to transport planning for development proposals (submitted as part of planning applications for new development), while seeking more sustainable and active travel parking provisions.
Proposal	This document supports the implementation of the LTCP targets to ensure that the LTCP policies is effective in its aims.
Evidence / Intelligence	The document is based on OCC's existing parking standards, while also taking into consideration national and local policy context (such as the National Planning Policy Framework, current census data etc), while also reviewing other documents published by other county council authorities. All documents are referenced throughout the document. An initial engagement process was undertaken which sought comments from a focussed group of internal colleagues. Following this, an further engagement process been embarked upon whereby input is being sought from officers at the district and city councils, industry stakeholders, other local highway authorities, and the authors of the guidance upon which the document is based.
Alternatives considered / rejected	Previous Local Transport Plans have not typically been supported by supplementary documents intended to ensure the effective implementation of OCC policy, so in that sense doing nothing was previously the option taken.

Category	Impact criteria	Score (-3 to +3)	Description of impact	Actions or mitigations to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timeline and monitoring arrangements
Energy	Increases energy efficiency	N/A				
Energy	Promotes a switch to low-carbon or renewable energy	1	Potentially results in less reliance on private motor vehicles in favour of public transport and active transport modes, thus helps to replace carbon-based systems with low-carbon technologies.			
Energy	Promotes resilient, local, smart energy systems	N/A				
Transport & Connectivity	Reduces need to travel and/or the need for private car ownership	3	The aim of this document is focussed reducing car parking at new development to where people journey to across the county. If there is less parking at a desintaiton this will help influcence their travel behaviour and encourage alternative transport modes to be be considered instead of the private car.			
Transport & Connectivity	Supports active travel	2	The aim of this document is focussed reducing car parking at new development to where people journey to across the county. If there is less parking at a desintaiton this will help influcence their travel behaviour and encourage alternative transport modes to be be considered instead of the private car. It will also seek more sustainable and active travel parking provisions.			
Transport & Connectivity	Increases use of public transport	1	The aim of this document is focussed reducing car parking at new development to where people journey to across the county. If there is less parking at a desintaiton this will help influcence their travel behaviour and encourage alternative transport modes to be be considered instead of the private car.			

Transport & Connectivity	Accelerates electrification of transport	1	One of the requirement within this document is to require EV charging point infrastrcture to be provided for new developments. For residential uses this is to be provided per new unit, for commerical a minimum provision is to be provided in accordance Oxfordshire's Electrical Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy.
Buildings	Promotes net zero new builds and developments	N/A	
Buildings	Accelerates retrofitting of existing buildings	N/A	
Nature	Protects, restores or enhances biodiversity, landscape and ecosystems	1	By seeking to minimise / reduce car parking levels on site, this document should help to protect local habitats and wildlife.
Nature	Develops blue and green infrastructure	N/A	
Nature	Improves access to nature and green spaces	N/A	
Waste & Consumption	Reduces overall consumption	N/A	
Waste & Consumption	Supports waste prevention and drive reuse and recycling	N/A	
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to flooding	N/A	
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience to other extreme weather events (e.g., storms, cold snaps, heatwaves, droughts)	N/A	
Resilience & Adaptation	Increases resilience of council services, communities, energy systems, transport infrastructure and/or supply chains	1	By contributing towards decarbonising the transport network, this document helps to reduce the transport network's detrimental impacts on climate change
Procurement & Investment	Procurement practices prioritise low-carbon options, circular economy and sustainability	N/A	
Procurement & Investment	Investment being considered supports climate action/ is consistent with path to net zero	N/A	
People & Organizations	Drives behavioural change to address the climate and ecological emergency	1	This document aims to reduce car parking at new development to where people journey to across the county. If there is less parking at a desintaiton / work place - this will help influcence their travel behaviour and encourage alternative transport modes to be be considered instead of the private car. This will help support the council's objective to address the climate and ecological emergency.

People & Organizations	Drives organizational and systemic change to address the climate and ecological emergency	3	The document supports the County Council's and other organisation's (district and city councils, developers, etc.) efforts to address the climate and ecological emergency.
Just transition	Promotes green innovation and job creation	1	Through ensuring that new developments have reduced car parking on site - this will help promote new development site's provide high qulaity walking and cycling routes and public transport services, this approach may in turn help to drive green innovation and influence job creation.
Just transition	Promotes health and wellbeing	1	As a result of encouraging reduce car parking at new developemnts, this will encourage greater use of active transport modes for desintation journeys. This will help support improving air quality, encourage more people to be active, and improve access to green open space.
Just transition	Reduces poverty and inequality	N/A	

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CABINET

21 April 2026

Refresh of the Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028

Report by Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
   a) Note the refreshed Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028 and its four priority areas for attracting, supporting, developing and equipping colleagues to deliver high-quality services for Oxfordshire.
   b) Note that the full Strategy is provided as an accessible PDF, which sets out the detailed approach, supporting actions, and measures of success.

Executive Summary

2. The refreshed Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028 provides a clear, high-level direction for how the Council will support colleagues during a period of significant organisational change. It outlines the strategic intent behind the refresh, ensuring continued focus on leadership, culture and workforce capability while the organisation prepares for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), devolution and significant financial pressures. The accompanying full Strategy sets out the organisational priorities, detailed actions and measures that will guide delivery over the next year.

Summary of the strategy

3. The refreshed Strategy sets out the Council's approach to supporting and developing colleagues during 2026 – 2028. It builds on the previously approved 2024 – 2026 Strategy but refines priorities in response to current pressures, service needs and colleague feedback.

4. The Strategy is underpinned by the following **vision**:

   A fair, inclusive, and forward-thinking workplace where everyone can thrive, collaborate, and deliver outstanding services for our communities. We lead with integrity, compassion, and agility, celebrating diversity and putting inclusion at the heart of everything we do. Together, we are ready for the future.

5. The Strategy retains the four priority areas previously endorsed by Cabinet, refined for the current context:

   a) **Lead** – Leading by example at every level, living our values every day.

b) **Thrive** – Creating a supportive, inclusive environment where everyone can do their best.
c) **Grow** – Helping everyone build the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required for the future.
d) **Attract** – Attracting, recruiting and retaining talented, diverse people.

6. The full Strategy is provided as an accessible PDF in the annex.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

7. The Strategy underpins the Council's Strategic Plan 2025–2028 by strengthening support for young people leaving care into employment (as set out under 'Grow') and advancing the Council's ambition to be an employer of choice. It also aligns with wider organisational priorities, including financial sustainability, improved outcomes for residents, and ensuring the organisation is well-prepared for future change.

Financial Implications

8. The financial implications of delivering the Strategy are expected to be met from existing resources, including the HR and Culture Change service budget, previously agreed funding from the Transformation reserve, and, where work directly supports Local Government Reorganisation, from the LGR budget. No new or additional funding requirements are anticipated at this stage.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
Drew.Hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

9. There are no direct legal implications associated with noting this report. Any specific proposals arising from the Strategy will be assessed individually for legal considerations.

Jay Akbar
Head of Legal & Governance

Staff Implications

10. Delivery of the Strategy will be supported through existing staff resources within the HR and Culture Change service and by colleagues across the organisation as part of implementing the identified priorities. No new or additional staffing requirements are anticipated. Should any further staffing input be required to progress specific elements of the Strategy, this will be funded through the budgets outlined in the Financial Implications section.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

11. An updated Equality and Community Impact Assessment has been completed and shows a positive impact across all protected characteristics. This reflects the strategy's strengthened focus on inclusive recruitment and talent pipelines, accessible people policies and systems, enhanced leadership development, and improved wellbeing and engagement support through organisational change. No negative or disproportionate impacts have been identified.

Sustainability Implications

12. A Climate Impact Assessment has been completed. Minor positive impacts relate to increased visibility of active travel benefits and internal wellbeing initiatives.

Risk Management

13. Workforce capacity and organisational readiness for change remain key risks. These are being mitigated through prioritised work programmes, strengthened project management support and proactive engagement with services. Capacity and engagement considerations will be factored into delivery planning.

Consultations

14. Colleagues across all service areas, networks and unions have contributed to the refresh. Feedback from employee networks, services and corporate engagement informs the priorities and approach. The Strategy was considered by Informal Cabinet in February 2026.

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director Resources and Section 151 Officer

Annex:	Our People and Culture Strategy 2026–2028 (Accessible PDF)
Background papers:	Nil
Contact Officer:	Cherie Cuthbertson, Director of HR and Cultural Change, Cherie.Cuthbertson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

April 2026

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2026–2028

DELIVERING
the Future Together

Our people and culture strategy

Together, we are the moment makers – delivering the future for Oxfordshire

Together, we are the moment makers

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Creating an environment where everyone can thrive and perform

Our collective strength at Oxfordshire County Council comes from how we live our values through the dedication, commitment, and resilience we show each day in our work. Together, we all play a part in delivering service excellence for the residents of Oxfordshire, whilst building and enhancing our culture – every manager, team, leader and colleague contributes.

We offer diverse services and we have colleagues from a wide range of professions and vocations. These include over 300 social workers, 280 firefighters, more than 200 support workers, as well as registrars, solicitors, planners, tree surgeons, librarians, archaeologists and many more. It's a fascinating place to work.

The Our People and Culture Strategy is about creating an environment where everyone can thrive and perform. It is our ambition to continue to be an 'employer of choice' in Oxfordshire – by working together, we can make our council a welcoming and inspiring place for all, where diverse strengths and perspectives are celebrated and everyone can succeed.

Our 'Including Everyone' framework for 2025–29 sets out our vision for achieving an inclusive workplace, inclusive service delivery and inclusive communities – demonstrating our commitment to reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion in all that we do.

The year ahead brings big changes for all of us – from preparing for local government reorganisation and devolution, to navigating some real financial pressures. But change also brings opportunity.

Together, we have a chance to reimagine how we serve Oxfordshire, transform our services, and to create a more connected, supportive and ambitious culture across our communities. To deliver this, we need to stay flexible, resilient and responsive so we can shape the change that lies ahead.

Our ideas, feedback and experiences have shaped this strategy. Through open conversations and collaboration with colleagues from all service areas, our inclusion networks and unions, enabling us to focus on what matters most to us all.

This strategy will help us make a difference for Oxfordshire and its residents. Are you ready for the challenges ahead? Find out more in the following pages.

Highlights of what we've achieved together 2024–2026

Lead

- We've increased our focus on developing leadership capability across the organisation. During 2025, more than 100 hours were invested in development activities, including monthly leadership sessions and bi-annual awaydays.
- The reciprocal mentoring scheme has also continued to grow, now with 60 co-mentoring pairs, all sharing their lived experience, helping us strengthen inclusive leadership behaviours.

Thrive

- The Oxfordshire Connects event brought together more than 700 colleagues, with 89 per cent of feedback saying it was useful and helped them feel more connected and supported.
- We have undertaken a cultural review and introduced a new, shortened pulse survey to gauge how everyone is feeling about working at Oxfordshire County Council – listening to your voices and shaping our engagement approach.

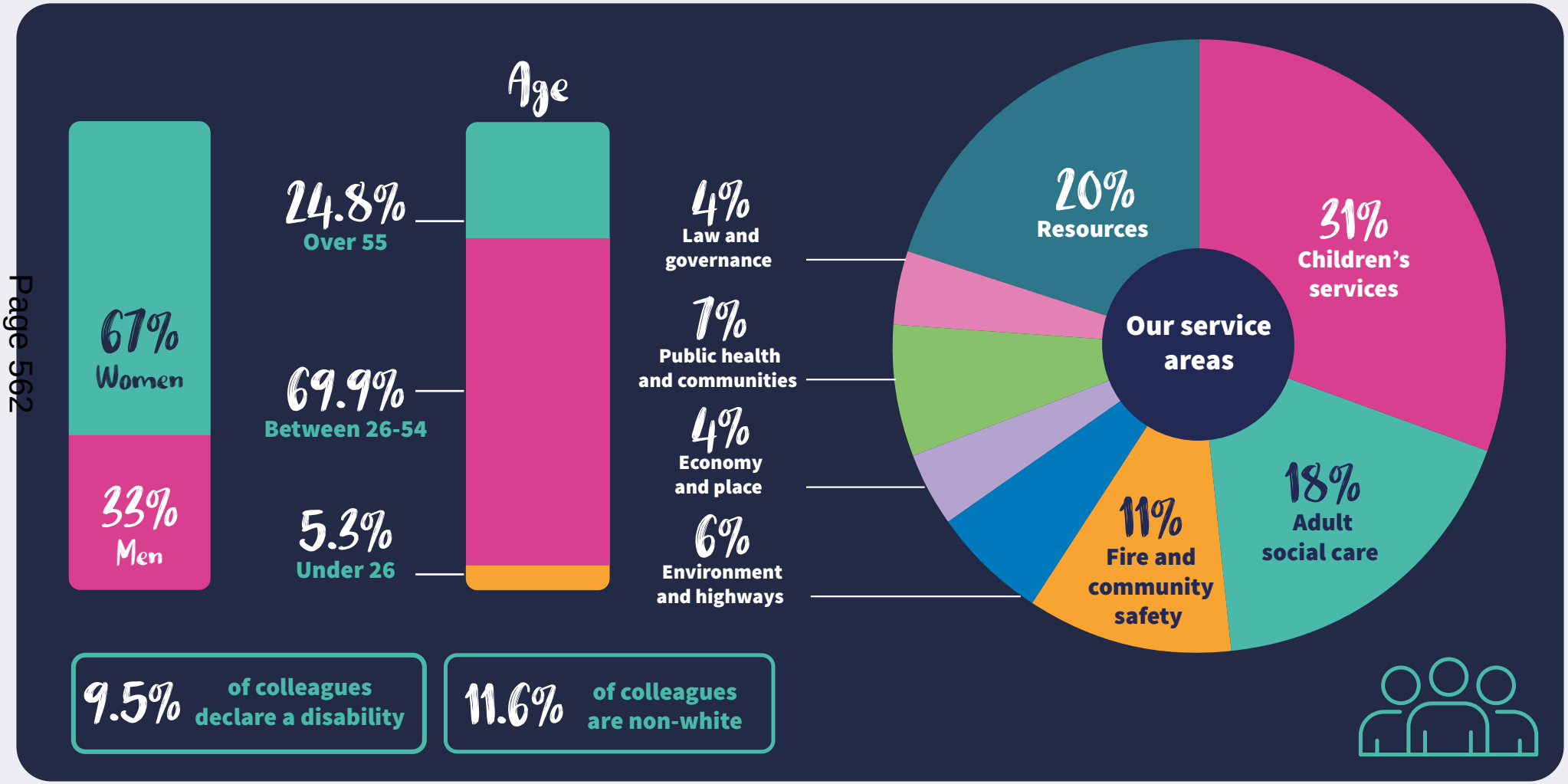
Grow

- Apprenticeships are an important way for us to recruit and develop future talent. More than 340 colleagues are currently on apprenticeship programmes.
- Facilities management are recruiting significant numbers of apprentices and developing clear talent pipelines, while legal services and both adult's and children's services continue to grow strong apprenticeship cohorts – including many social work apprentices.
- Apprentices are bringing fresh skills, progressing into permanent roles, and helping to fill hard-to-recruit posts.

Attract

- Children's social care legal team has been strengthened by working closely with the talent team to attract candidates into hard-to-recruit roles.
- The team successfully recruited five new full-time colleagues – including newly qualified solicitors – which means there is less reliance on agency support and resulted in a significant reduction in agency spend over the year.
- This has improved stability, strengthened continuity for children and families and enhanced the overall quality of support delivered across the service.

Over 5,000 colleagues delivering diverse services in Oxfordshire



Our people: Culture

- Our shared values shape our culture, guiding how we work together and support each other.
- Our Delivering the Future Together Champions work closely with teams to bring these values to life on a daily basis.
- We work closely with recognised unions – including UNISON, the Fire Brigades Union and others representing education and specialist staff – to ensure every voice is heard and everyone feels supported.
- Our 'Including Everyone' framework sets our vision and commitment to lead the way in creating a fair and inclusive Oxfordshire, by building an inclusive workplace culture, delivering inclusive services and tackling inequalities in the communities we serve.
- Colleagues describe Oxfordshire County Council as a kind, supportive and purpose-driven place to work, with strong relationships, inclusive leadership, teams who look out for each other, and the flexibility that helps people do their best work.
- At the same time, colleagues say the experience isn't always consistent and that clearer priorities, simpler processes, more joined-up communication and well-managed change would help everyone feel more confident, informed and supported across all teams.



Our vision and priorities

Our vision for people and culture in Oxfordshire County Council

A fair, inclusive, and forward-thinking workplace where everyone can thrive, collaborate and deliver outstanding services for our communities. We lead with integrity, compassion and agility, celebrating diversity and putting inclusion at the heart of everything we do. Together, we are ready for the future.



- Leading by example at every level, living our values every day.



- Creating a supportive, inclusive environment where everyone can do their best.



- Help everyone build the knowledge, skills, and behaviours required for the future.



- Attracting, recruiting and retaining talented, diverse people.

Where we focus next – together



- Strengthen our shared vision and culture and further embed our values into everyday practice.
- Invest in leadership development to help us succeed in a period of rapid change.
- Identify and develop future leaders, from a more diverse pool of candidates, and build succession pipelines.



- Make people data, policies, and systems clear and easy to access for all.
- Run engagement activities that put equality, diversity, and inclusion at the centre, and keep everyone informed and involved as we change.
- Promote healthy working practices and provide proactive support so colleagues can thrive at work.



- Improve the learning and development offer and make this more accessible for everyone.
- Invest in our managers, helping them to understand their responsibilities through targeted learning and equipping them to lead teams through change.
- Open up career pathways and prioritise opportunities for care leavers.



- Develop workforce plans to fill key roles and secure future talent.
- Strengthen our brand and identity to make the organisation a welcoming, rewarding place for all.
- Improve recruitment and talent management to build diverse pipelines.

DELIVERING
the Future Together

How will we know we're successful?

Diverse and inclusive workforce

- Colleagues reflect Oxfordshire's communities at all levels, including senior roles, and we continue to diversify our workforce.

Fair and competitive pay

- Colleagues know our pay is fair, and pay gaps are low and clearly reported.

Positive onboarding and induction

- New colleagues join quickly and smoothly, with a positive onboarding and induction experience.

Engagement and culture

- Colleagues are engaged and supported, with a strong sense of belonging and trust. Regular pulse surveys help us listen and respond, measuring how we lead through change.

Retention and turnover

- We retain talented people, maintain healthy turnover, and celebrate those leaving as well as those progressing.

People thrive and feel well

- Colleagues are healthy, supported, and able to perform at their best. Sickness absence is reduced, and employee relations cases are resolved promptly, helping boost productivity and morale.

Career growth and social mobility

- Colleagues have clear opportunities for progression, the apprenticeship levy is fully utilised, and we support social mobility–for example, by providing 30 care leaver work placements.

Operating efficiently and sustainably

- We make best use of our workforce by converting more temporary roles to permanent, ensuring efficient use of resources and achieving financial sustainability.

Delivering LGR together

- We successfully deliver local government reorganisation, working collaboratively and staying focused on public service for Oxfordshire's residents.

DELIVERING
the Future Together

Organisational people and culture KPIs

Employee engagement	Colleagues recommend Oxfordshire County Council as a great place to work.
Wellbeing	Average working days lost and stress related absence reduces.
Retention in hard to fill roles	Retention of talent within hard to fill roles.
Workforce diversity	Diversity that matches our Oxfordshire community. Improved diversity mobility rate.
Apprentices and care leavers	Use the apprentice levy to support hard to fill roles and care leaver placements.
Organisational redesign	Successful redesign which achieved the savings target.
Gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps	Maintain low pay gaps.
Time to hire	Quicker recruitment and successful hires.
Agency spend and usage	A reduction in spend on agency workers.

We will provide six-monthly updates to track and share our progress against these KPIs.

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Division(s): N/A

CABINET – 21 APRIL 2025

FORWARD PLAN AND FUTURE BUSINESS

Items identified from the Forward Plan for Forthcoming Decision

Topic/Decision	Portfolio/Ref

Cabinet, 19 May 2026

▪ **Economic Development Strategy** A new economic strategy for Oxfordshire is currently in development. This item is to approve the strategy, make funding decisions, and delegate authority as necessary.	Cabinet, 26/017 - Cabinet Member for Future Economy and Innovation
▪ **Capital Programme Approvals - May 2026** Report on variation to the capital programme for approval (as required).	Cabinet, 26/037 - Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation
▪ **Quiet Lanes Policy & Implementation Framework** This is a proposal to develop a Quiet Lanes policy for the county, along with an associated framework for their implementation. The policy, its benefits and the framework should be first tested through the implementation of a programme pilot (through 2026/27) before being fully adopted and rolled out on wider scale if appropriate.	Cabinet, 26/066 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Best Start in Life Plan** The Best Start in Life Plan is Oxfordshire's local plan setting out how partners will support babies and young children from pre-birth to school entry, in line with the Government's Giving every child the best start in life strategy.	Cabinet, 2026/084 - Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Future Economy and Innovation, 11 May 2026

▪ **Approval to Sign Space-Clipper Sub-Contract** A small contract covering the council's role in an innovation project funded by Innovate UK. The contract covers the council's role in testing the development of 3D visualisation of GIS data for local area energy planning and the EV charge point programme. Space Clipper seek our feedback in the development of their software tool given our expertise in the use cases they wish to investigate.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Future Economy and Innovation, 26/083 - Cabinet Member for

	Future Economy and Innovation

Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 21 May 2026

▪ **A40 HIF2 Dukes Cut Wolvercote Bridge Maintenance Works - Decision to Progress to Construction** Decision to agree funding for construction phase for project to allow for contractor award.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 25/145 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Proposed Changes to the MyBus Ticketing Scheme (2026/27)** Proposed changes to the MyBus multi operator ticketing scheme, for 2026/27 and beyond, to ensure its long term financial sustainability.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/053 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Brize Norton and Carterton: Proposed 30mph Speed Limit at Monahan Way, Norton Way and Carterton Road** Proposed reduction in speed limits to 30mph	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 25/248 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Proposed Traffic Calming - Townsend Road, Shrivenham** The current proposals comprise a new traffic calming scheme along Townsend Road to reduce speeds in the vicinity of the development. The traffic calming measures consist of dragon's teeth on the approach to the new '30'mph speed gateway, a Speed Indicator Device (SID) and 3Nr bus friendly speed cushions	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/025 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Land at Bicester Road, Kidlington - Proposed active travel measures** The bus stops, 3m shared footway/cycleway and the two signalised crossing is maintaining pedestrian and cyclist safety. The highway improvement will help future and current residents	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management,

to safely gain access to the existing and proposed footway/cycleway on either side of Bicester Road and the amenities in the area.	26/024 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Proposed 20mph - Hardwick Hill, Banbury** 20 mph speed limit being introduced to promote road safety	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/059 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Proposed 20mph Speed Limit - Fordwells** Introduction of a 20mph speed limit on roads within Fordwells, Parish of Asthall, which is being promoted as part of the councils vision zero project.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Langford Lane, Kidlington - Proposed 30mph Speed Limit Extension** Extension of existing 30mph limit to the junction with the A44 Woodstock Road as part of a development within the area	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/057 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Cutteslowe Primary School - Parking Restrictions** Consultation on parking restriction changes around the school entrance	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/056 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Shrivenham Parking Review 2026** Review of the parking scheme in central Shrivenham introduced in 2025. Proposals include no waiting restrictions and changes to disabled parking bays	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/055 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management

▪ **Botley Road, Oxford - Height Restrictions with Exemptions & Parking Changes** Requirement as part of the Botley Bridge Scheme to introduce a TRO for height restrictions with exemptions for buses at a certain height. Also includes amendments to parking restrictions	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Tramway, Banbury - Proposed Drop Off Restrictions** Creation of an additional drop off area near to Banbury Station with 30 min bays, 30 min disabled bay and no waiting restrictions	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Westminster Way, Botley - Proposed Permit Parking Area** New permit parking area funded through a S106 agreement for a hotel development in the area	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/048 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Proposed Traffic Calming - Eastern Bypass Road, Oxford** Implementation of proposed ramp for footway and cycleway priority over Gate 5 access associated with a planning condition: 23/02166/FUL	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/047 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Proposed Crossings, Traffic Calming and Cycleways - Abingdon Road, Culham** Proposals include a new 'Sparrow' type crossing at the existing signal junction, widening of an existing footway/cycleway to 3m and introduction of a raised side road entry treatment across Thame Lane. Provision of street lighting system.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/046 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Station Approach Road, Banbury - Proposed ANPR Enforcement** As part of the Tramway scheme, it is proposed to introduce	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member

ANPR enforcement of Bus only entry	for Transport Management, 26/071 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Oxfordshire Micromobility Scheme Contract** Key decision required to allow OCC to enter into a new concession contract with a future micromobility (e-scooter & e-bike) supplier	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/069 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **A40 Access to Witney - Traffic Management Orders** Proposed speed limit changes, clearway extensions and no entry restrictions associated with the junction improvements on the A40	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/068 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Proposed 20mph Speed Limit - Compton Beauchamp** Introduction of a 20mph speed limit as part of vision zero.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/065 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **A4158 Rose Hill Service Road - Appraisal of Options** The report outlines the highway options available to address the collision history at the southern access to the service road.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 25/257 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Active Travel Guidance for Streetworks** Proposal to discuss guidance documentation prepared by the network co-ordination team to provide better outcomes	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/076 - Cabinet Member for

	Transport Management
▪ **Proposed 40 & 50mph Speed Limits - A361, West Oxfordshire** Proposed changes for safety reasons along the A361 corridor include reductions to 40 and 50mph on various lengths. Being promoted under the vision zero projects	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/075 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management
▪ **Land at 60-68 Broadway, Didcot, Oxfordshire - Parking Amendments** Changes required to existing parking restrictions as part of a development which is creating an access onto Broadway, Didcot	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Transport Management, 26/074 - Cabinet Member for Transport Management

Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action, 21 May 2026

▪ **Community Action Group Project Oxfordshire Limited (CAGPOL) Grant Award** Award of 1 year Grant to CAGPOL Oxfordshire to continue grassroots environmental action in Oxfordshire in 2026/27	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action, 2026/087 - Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action

Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Adults, 19 May 2026

▪ **New Live Well At Home Framework Model** Live Well At Home (LWAH) Framework is currently facilitating delivery of domiciliary care in 3 main areas: D2A/Reablement (following hospital discharge); long-term home care; and care delivered at Extra Care Housing (ECH) schemes. The existing framework will end on 31st March 27.We require a key decision regarding the implementation of the new model of LWAH framework.	Delegated Decisions by Cabinet Member for Adults, 26/009 - Cabinet Member for Adults

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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Issue: **Local Area Partnership Monitoring and Priority Action Plan**

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

Date response requested:[2] **17 March 2026**

Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
That the Council should set out a clear plan for the long-term sustainability and resourcing of targeted SEND support across Oxfordshire, ensuring that improvements made through the Local Area SEND Partnership can be maintained despite	Accepted	Subsequent to this meeting the Council are required by the DfE to set out a SEND Reform plan which will include a review of targeted SEND support across Oxfordshire, with financial commitments over the next 3 years. 30th June 2026

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ongoing financial and demand pressures.		
That the Council should provide an updated strategic statement on the purpose, role, and operational expectations of resource bases within Oxfordshire schools, including how these bases will be funded and supported in the medium- to long-term as part of the wider SEND Improvement Programme.	Accepted	The Council are undertaking a sufficiency review currently with a focus on resource bases and committed funding and will publish a Position statement by 30th May 2026. A longer term sufficiency strategy will follow by December 2026.

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Issue: **2025 Provisional Attainment Outcomes**

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People**

Date response requested:[2] **27 January 2026**

Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
1. That the Council should adapt its protocol so that local members are notified when Cabinet members and senior officers visit schools within their division.	Partially Accepted	Senior officers attend schools routinely, both planned and as required, and it would not be practical to advise local members for every school visit.
2. That the Council should celebrate successes and share best practice across the family of schools in the area.	Partially accepted	The Council routinely celebrate successes and share best practice across numerous networks and through newsletters to

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		schools. There is no date for implementation as this is already in place.
3. That the Council, in developing the Oxfordshire Education and Inclusion Strategy, should ensure that sufficient attention is given to child safeguarding and protection as well as the curriculum review.	Accepted	The Oxfordshire Education Partnership has amended its membership and established an Executive group to ensure inclusion of the education lead on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Partnership Executive group, safeguarding remains a priority for all education settings and schools. This has been actioned.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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Issue: **Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) Guidance**

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**

Date response requested:[2] **17 March 2026**

Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
That the Council should arrange for the EOTAS guidance to be broken down, with simpler, plain English and accessible information provided for parents and carers, supported by appendices containing officer processes and technical detail.	Accepted	The Deputy Director will arrange a joint face to face meeting with the PCF to review and amend the EOTAS guidance for parents and technical appendices. 30th May 2026

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Issue: **Fostering**

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People**

Date response requested:[2] **27 January 2026**

Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
1. That the Council should commit to 'Fostering Friendly Oxfordshire' and continue to work with district councils and other key stakeholders to achieve this.	Accepted	The council is now a Fostering Friendly Local Authority. The recruitment and marketing team is working with districts, business sector, school/college setting as well as 3rd sector to promote Fostering friendly ethos.
2. That the Council should explore in more detail the possibility of a council tax-related offer for foster carers.	Accepted	The Fostering Marketing team is undertaking a business case on options for a potential reduction for foster carers, so they pay an adjusted Council Tax. As a part of this we are benching approach in other Local Authorities.

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Issue: BMMR (with a focus on Public Health)

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Kate Gregory, Cabinet Member for Public Health & Inequalities**

Date response requested:[2] **27 January 2026**

Response to recommendations

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
1. That the Council clarifies its plan as to how it will lead on developing with system partners a shared understanding of and common approach to addressing local health inequality priorities.	Accepted	The council's commitment to the Marmot approach is being overseen by the HWB, to ensure this is aligned and embedded with other key system agendas. Systemwide partners are working together at a senior level through an advisory board, to agree key areas of focus. The Institute of Health Equity review

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		of inequalities, initially focusing on CYP, is driving shared commitment to addressing the identified inequalities, and ensuring this is informed by the experience of residents. In addition, the council are driving a "social movement" approach, promoting, training, and mapping examples of work on health equity. This includes an ambition to build health equity into strategies and services at the start.
2. That the Council devises a relevant metric or metrics to enable it to understand vaping prevalence in the county, to allow it to take informed steps to reduce its harms.	Accepted	That the Council devises a relevant metric to enable it to understand vaping prevalence amongst young people in the county, to allow it to take informed steps to reduce its use amongst young people (acknowledging that smoking is more harmful than vaping and regulated vapes are a NICE recommended method for smokers to quit BUT vaping is not recommended for non smokers)
3. That the Council undertakes a review of the successes and areas for improvement of the Homes for Ukraine scheme to inform the types of support necessary to maximise the chances of arriving families integrating and thriving under Community Sponsorship	Accepted	That the Council undertakes a review of the successes and areas for improvement of the Homes for Ukraine scheme to inform the types of support necessary to maximise the chances of arriving families integrating and thriving under Community Sponsorship (Accepted) The Homes for Ukraine (HfU) scheme enables UK hosts to accommodate Ukrainians in their own homes. Each arrival comes with an integration tariff of £5,900 per person that is paid to local authorities to undertake welfare, DBS and property checks, as well as provide a range of support to help them access services and integrate into the community over an initial 3-year period. This scheme is fundamentally different from the Community Sponsorship (CS) scheme which enables voluntary and community groups to sponsor refugees. There is no

		funding for the local authority as the sponsor group provides the support function, including the provision of suitable accommodation and having to raise £9,000 to support the individual or family over a 2-year period. Local authorities are involved in the checking process to ensure sponsor groups have the appropriate safeguarding and safety processes in place. There have been very few families sponsored under CS nationally, with only 1 family in Oxfordshire – whereas there have been over 3,000 Ukrainians coming to stay in the county. The HfU scheme has highlighted the importance of local authorities being involved in the safeguarding, welfare and property checks, and the need for effective partnership working between central and local government, and between local authorities and the VCS. While CS offers a sustainable model of integration, it requires significant upfront planning, fundraising, and long-term commitment from community groups, as well as system level support from local authorities and other partners for longer-term stability.

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Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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Issue: Parking Permits

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management**

Date response requested:[2] **27 January 2026**

Response to report:

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[1] Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received
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Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

Response to recommendations

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
1. That the Council recognises the urgent need for improvements in the online parking permit system, and extends the current contract by only one year	Accept	Initial extension has only been agreed for 1 year. There is still the option / ability to extend for a 2nd year if required but it is not the intention to do so.
2. That as part of the early scoping process for the procurement, the Council involves members in reviewing the current system to identify, understand and design-out current flaws	Accept	An appropriate level of stakeholder engagement and independent user tested will be built into the procurement and subsequent system testing process.
3. That the Council prioritises quality and functionality over price in its weighting for the procurement of the new online parking permit system and/or reviews the measures it uses to adjudge quality to make them more reflective of end user experience.	Accept	As per the county council's standard approach currently, contract assessment will be based on 60% quality, 10% social value and 30% price. User experience is a key part of the quality element with assessed user demonstrations.
4. That the Council reviews its CPZ and parking strategy urgently, to allow it to inform the Council's technological requirements	Accept	The enforcement service is engaging with transport policy teams with a view to update countywide parking policy & strategies, including CPZ. Ahead of that, Civil Enforcement Operational Policy is currently being reviewed and will be consulted on. To confirm future contracts will be flexible enough to respond to changes in parking policies and maximise the use of the latest technology to manage and enforce.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

5. That the Cabinet investigates the viability of enabling trained 'super-users' to check the permit status of a particular car and report it to the Council without violating GDPR	Partially accept	The viability of 'super users' has been investigated from a number of angles, including employment law and user safety. From a data protection perspective, any information processed by a superuser must not indicate offence or give personal information, as this is enforcement data which requires prescribed lawful basis and statutory function for processing. As such providing the status of a particular car is not appropriate. However, there maybe options such as reviewing the status of say 10 cars or providing a direct feed to the council. As it is considered there are benefits to this, the feasibility of this will continue to be investigated.
6. That the Council, if it does not already do so, adopts a policy of writing to non-visitor permit users who do not have e mails to warn them when their permits are shortly to expire.	Accepted	Reviews of existing processes are being undertaken with the plan to improve communication - including implement writing to residents ahead of the permit expiry date for users who are not able to be contacted electronically. The intention is to identify an automated solution to the creation of letters.
7. That the Council works to raise awareness amongst GPs about their role in supporting unregistered carers access parking permits	Accepted	Officers have and will continue to engage with GP's to support this process through the traffic filters/ congestion charge trial and the need to support permit applications. This was met with limited success. We will continue to work with comms team within the council as how to improve engagement with GP's.

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Issue: Draft Social Value Policy

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation**

Date response requested:[2] **24 February 2026**

Response to report: Report of Performance and Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

Response to recommendations

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
1. That any policy on supporting social value through procurement should form part of a wider policy on generating social value and supporting community wealth building across all the Council's functions, and that the Cabinet should commit to a holistic approach.	Accept	The policy sets the Council's procurement and commissioning mechanism for delivering wider benefits through contracts, aligned to local priorities and wider corporate commitments. While procurement is one lever among many, the approach supports consistent practice through themed questions, delivery planning, contract management and annual reporting. This provides a foundation that can complement wider place-based and community wealth ambitions across the Council's functions. A nominated officer (HO Commercial and Procurement) will be placed to lead the linking up of social value across the organisation and with external stakeholders. One action being taken forward is a social value prospectus from the councils service areas. Actions will also be taken to ensure policies such as Community Asset Transfer feature the same themes to give a cohesive approach which can be easily understood by internal and external stakeholders.
2. That in developing and implementing its new social value policy, the Cabinet should draw on the experience of best-practice councils including Durham, Manchester and Preston, as well as the 2023 commissioned report from the Centre for Local Economic Strategies.	Accept	The Council has drawn on external learning in developing the in-house approach and will continue to benchmark and improve over time. This includes that of Durham, Camden and Preston. The policy includes a commitment to periodic review so it remains current with changing legislation, market conditions and local priorities. The revised approach is intentionally streamlined to reduce administrative burden and improve uptake, while maintaining clear expectations and accountability for delivery. Actions on this are to include: Continue horizon scanning and

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		benchmarking; incorporate learning through periodic review and refreshed guidance.
3. That That the Cabinet considers, when developing a new set of Themes, Outcomes, and Measures (TOMs) for application in Oxfordshire, how these reflect its commitments to putting climate change at the heart of everything it does as well as safeguarding the wellbeing of future generations.	Reject	The Council is not proposing to develop a bespoke TOMs framework. Instead, the in-house approach uses five local priority themes and contract-specific questions, with SMART measures that remain clearly related to the subject matter of each contract and proportionate in application. This provides flexibility to embed climate considerations where relevant, while retaining a practical approach for suppliers and contract managers.
4. That the Cabinet considers how its new social value policy can support delivery of the Council's Local Nature Recovery Strategy.	Accept	The Council can support local nature recovery through the environmental and place-based outcomes that can be sought under the 'Local Area Regeneration' theme, where relevant to the contract. The themes enable service areas to frame questions that reflect local priorities and ensure deliverability through market engagement. This is complemented by the Council's ethical and sustainable procurement requirements, which strengthen expectations on environmental performance across the supply chain. Suppliers will be directed to the LNRS mapping tools and other resources to maintain a localised approach to any delivery.
5. That the Cabinet should set targets and make available to organisations proven, impactful projects which focus on the key priorities the Council would like to address in relation to social value	Partially Accept	The policy establishes five priority themes to provide a consistent framework linking to the strategic priorities of the council, whilst allowing service areas to drill down into more specific, contract-relevant asks through the procurement process. For each qualifying procurement, service areas select two themes to maintain focus. Questions are then developed to suit the contract and the market, supported by pre-market engagement to ensure the ask is deliverable. Suppliers are required to submit a Social Value Delivery Plan with SMART measures, milestones and estimated costs, enabling delivery to be monitored through

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

		contract management and reported transparently. This will be reflected in an annual social value report.
6. That the Cabinet specifically considers the opportunities to support social value through the disposal of land and property and ensure policy is developed around this, especially around Community Asset Transfer.	Reject	The Council recognises the importance of land and property decisions in delivering community benefit. However, the Social Value Policy is designed specifically for procurement and commissioning activity. Opportunities relating to land, property and Community Asset Transfer are best addressed through the appropriate property governance routes, including a new CAT policy which is under development. This policy development has worked closely to mirror the priorities outlined in the social value policy to maintain consistency. Next steps are to ensure links between approaches are reflected through appropriate property governance and policy development routes.
7. That the Cabinet should work alongside fellow anchor institutions in the public (and private sector) to align their procurement policies to maximise social value generation and their collective impact on the wider Oxfordshire economy through their purchasing power.	Accept	The Council supports working with partners and anchor institutions to maximise the collective impact of local spend and delivery. The in-house approach provides a clear, locally aligned framework that can be shared and discussed with partners, whilst ensuring award criteria remain lawful, contract-relevant and proportionate. The Council will continue to progress this through existing partnership routes and will be working pre and post LGR with relevant anchor institutions in shaping the wider social value approach of Oxfordshire.
8. That the Cabinet should work with anchor institutions in the public (and private sector) to adopt a shared understanding of social value and work together to direct contributions to support schemes which have a long-lasting impact on Oxfordshire residents and their communities.	Accept	The themed approach provides a shared structure for social value, while allowing service areas to tailor specific asks to local need and market capability through pre-market engagement. Delivery is secured through Social Value Delivery Plans and monitored through contract management. Where non-delivery persists after remediation, the approach allows for service credits that are ring-fenced and reinvested against the Council's social value themes, supporting targeted and transparent use of funds. The next steps for building out our relations with anchor institutions include developing clear comms for partners on themes, delivery planning

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

		and reporting; explore options for shared understanding through OIEP and other anchor institutes around Oxfordshire and working on our social value prospectus for exempt contracts from the main social value workflow.
9. That the Cabinet considers having a light-touch set of social value requirements for smaller contracts	Reject	The new approach is already designed to be proportionate. Social value tender weighting applies by default only for procurements above £100,000, with defined exemptions where applying the standard approach would not be appropriate (for example, short-duration contracts and certain VCSE markets). For lower value contracts, officers can still secure appropriate outcomes through contract design and ethical requirements without introducing unnecessary process or cost for smaller suppliers. Ongoing actions will be to embed proportionality and exemptions through guidance and templates and support service areas to apply the approach consistently.
10. That the Cabinet reconsiders the proposed social value weighting which is currently set at the statutory minimum of 10%.	Reject	The proposed weighting of 10% is intended as a proportionate baseline that supports consistent application and reduces barriers to participation, particularly for smaller suppliers, while maintaining appropriate balance with price and quality. This approach was chosen to allow more focus on quality and cost, whilst maintaining excellent social value. Some of the sustainability elements have now been embedded into contract specifications through the ethical procurement policy, allowing for a lower weighting of social value. This will be monitored for supplier uptake and contract management success.
11. That the Cabinet should ensure that its choice of social value measures incentivises inclusive forms of ownership, including co-operatives and social enterprises.	Partial Acceptance	The Council recognises the contribution of social enterprises, co-operatives and SMEs, and the policy supports proportionate application and avoids undue barriers for such organisations. While the Social Value Policy necessarily provides a consistent structure to support improved delivery of social value, the Council's wider social value action plan incorporates ambitions to further

		reduce barriers to entry for VCSEs and SMEs, and to seek routes to ring-fencing specific opportunities for those types of organisations that inherently support the Council's social value ambitions. This is therefore out of the scope for further action under this policy.