

CABINET
21 OCTOBER 2025

GET OXFORDSHIRE WORKING PLAN

Report by Director of Economy & Place

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a. **APPROVE** the Get Oxfordshire Working Plan on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council.
 - b. **NOTE** Other partner organisations (including the Jobcentre Plus and NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board) will be taking the Plan through their own approval processes.
 - c. **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Economy & Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Future Economy & Innovation, to make any amendments arising from the Cabinet discussion and to account for feedback from partner organisations, and sign off the final plan.
 - d. **DELEGATE** authority to the Director of Economy & Place, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Future Economy & Innovation, to refresh and/or make revisions to the Plan as appropriate during its lifetime.

Executive Summary

2. In the Get Britain Working White Paper, the government made a commitment to support all areas to develop local Get Britain Working Plans and to convene local partners to work together to develop and deliver them. Plans are intended to set out an analysis of economic inactivity in each local area and highlight the actions that could be taken to improve outcomes for the local population and local employers.
3. The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) wrote to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) on 28 February 2025, requiring the Council to lead the development of the Get Oxfordshire Working Plan (GOWP). The requirement is for the plan to be produced by October 2025 and formally signed off by OCC, the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board and Jobcentre Plus, with endorsement from wider partners and stakeholders.

4. Guidance issued by DWP outlined the required structure for local Get Britain Working Plans:
 - Labour market analysis
 - Drivers and causes of economic inactivity
 - Current system and offer
 - Working with partners
 - Systemic challenges
 - Priority actions and longer-term goals
 - Governance, local engagement, and future iterations
5. The DWP recognises that considerable work is already underway in local areas so the new plan should align with and encompass relevant local programmes and strategies to avoid duplication of effort.
6. The GOWP meets DWP's requirements and proposes a course of action for the next 12 months, aligned with the Connect to Work programme that supports one of the priority cohorts.
7. It is aligned with local plans and strategies to reduce economic inactivity and raise employment rates, and with a holistic focus on place-based strategies, robust governance, and collaboration, the GOWP aims to ensure that all residents can access opportunities, reduce inequalities, and contribute to a sustainable and vibrant economy.

Oxfordshire context and characteristics

8. Oxfordshire has a population of 760,000 and includes urban areas like Oxford City and rural districts like West Oxfordshire. It is an economic hub for innovation within life sciences, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing. Oxfordshire already outperforms the Government's target employment rate of 80%, with a rate of 83.9%. However, challenges persist in ensuring equitable access to work, opportunities and addressing pockets of deprivation, skill mismatches, and barriers to employment for specific community members.
9. The county's labour market exhibits stark contrasts with high-quality job concentrations but also faces challenges. High housing costs (61% higher than the England average) can impact recruitment and retention, especially for key workers who are not able to afford accommodation locally. In addition, with limited connectivity and public transport, particularly in rural areas, this constrains labour mobility. Finally, skills mismatches and sector-specific shortages in industries including health, logistics, and construction stymies growth and the ability to create jobs requiring different skills levels.

Key opportunities

10. This Plan has identified a number of opportunities to support the further reduction of unemployment, economic inactivity and unstable jobs such as:
- Existing local activity, such as the work to develop the Oxfordshire Local Skills Improvement Plan and the Connect to Work programme, will support job seekers by linking them directly with local employers and by providing valuable career guidance.
 - Using Oxfordshire's status as a "Marmot Place" to address health inequalities, which are closely linked to employment outcomes.
 - Existing establishment of sector-based work academies run through Job Centre Plus helps to connect individuals with employers by offering training, work experience and guaranteed interviews
 - More opportunities to leverage extensive joint commissioning between health and local authorities, supported by pooled budgets exceeding £500 million.

Priority challenges

11. The challenges that this Plan must address revolve around economic inequalities. There are clear disparities between rural and urban areas impact opportunities, with particular concentration of deprivation in parts of Oxford City. From an individual cohort perspective, the "Get Britain Working" White Paper identifies several communities requiring a greater level of support. In Oxfordshire, these cohorts match across challenges faced by:
- Those with long-term health conditions and disabilities face significant employment gaps.
 - Young people, particularly in rural areas, are hindered by lack of transport and vocational pathways.
 - Refugees and non-native English speakers encounter access challenges in education and qualifications recognition.
12. Equally, the wider system must work closely together to improve the demand for employees with different skills sets to develop a more inclusive economy. Across Oxfordshire, there is a persistent skills shortage in critical sectors such as health and construction and inadequate employer awareness of workplace adaptations and inclusive hiring practices.

System and structural reforms

13. The Plan identifies six thematic goals to drive systemic improvements:
- Local anchor engagement - engaging major employers and local authorities to create inclusive employment strategies.
 - Enhanced data infrastructure - building a centralised data repository for tracking employment outcomes and tailoring interventions.
 - Provision of additional pathways - expanding opportunities for neurodiverse individuals, ex-offenders, and those with caring responsibilities.
 - Leveraging national policy - tapping policies like the NHS 10-Year Plan to integrate health and employment initiatives.

- Coordinated multi-agency outreach - creating a "no wrong door" approach to deliver cohesive support across agencies.
- Addressing wider determinants through a whole system approach - tackling housing, transport, and childcare barriers to boost labour market participation.

Action plan

14. A central part of this Plan is the action plan which sits alongside it. These actions will need to be regularly measured and monitored to ensure that they are addressing levels of unemployment, economic inactivity and unstable employment. Key actions include:
 - Expanding English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provisions
 - Aligning skills training with labour market needs
 - Connecting underserved cohorts with tailored services via initiatives like the Connect to Work programme.
15. Strong partnerships with organisations such as the Department for Work and Pensions and the Integrated Care Board with delivery through the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership are central to the Plan's success.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

16. The GOWP is directly supportive of the Council's vision to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county (particularly the latter two). It will do so by tackling inactivity and inequality; promoting inclusive growth and access to opportunity; and supporting health and wellbeing through by promoting and enabling more people to access good work.

Financial Implications

17. The development of the Get Oxfordshire Working Plan has been funded in full by a grant from the Department for Work & Pensions. Oxfordshire County Council is the accountable body for that grant. The implementation of the Plan has no current funding allocation from Oxfordshire County Council or partners (although Connect to Work – one of the key delivery workstreams – is funded by DWP), but it is anticipated that future funding for government programmes will support delivery activity based on the evidence base, and actions detailed in the Plan. Partners may wish to align current and future funded activity with actions outlined in the Plan where this achieves benefits for local businesses and residents.

Comments checked by:

Name, Title, email (Finance)

Legal Implications

18. Whilst there are no direct legal implications for the Council arising from the approval of the Get Oxfordshire Working Plan (GOWP). The GOWP has been developed in line with national guidance and within the existing statutory powers of the Council, specifically the Council's general power of competence under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. At this stage, the initial delivery will be through current legal and commissioning frameworks.
19. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill which is currently at Committee Stage in the House of Commons introduces a new statutory basis for Strategic Authorities, including Combined County Authorities, with defined powers over skills and employment support. As these provisions progress, further legal consideration may be required to reflect any new responsibilities or commissioning powers transferred to the area.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
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Staff Implications

20. There are no direct staffing implications arising from the GOWP – however, delivery of the Plan will require matrix working within and beyond the County Council through existing resources.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

21. The GOWP has considered publicly available data concerning a range of demographics and how they interact with the Oxfordshire labour market. It is the express intention of the GOWP that those furthest or at risk of exclusion from the labour market benefit from the systematic approach outlined in the Plan. Any service implications arising from the approval of the GOWP will be subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Sustainability Implications

22. There are no sustainability implications arising from the GOWP.

Risk Management

23. Oxfordshire County Council is required by the Department for Work & Pensions to develop and approve the GOWP, as part of the Get Britain Working White Paper. The key risk in not doing so is the reputational damage to Oxfordshire County Council.

Consultations

24. The first draft of the GOWP has been developed in consultation with partners and stakeholders, such as the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, the Integrated Care Board, and the Jobcentre Plus. Further engagement with residents and businesses is a key next step following the publication of the Plan, with a view to a second iteration for 2026/27.

Robin Rogers, Director of Economy & Place

Annex: Annex 1: First draft of the Get Oxfordshire Working Plan

Background papers: Nil

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