

Oxfordshire County Council

Annual report 2008/09



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The following documents are available on our website www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/annualreport

- Corporate balanced scorecard 2008/09**
- Local area agreement targets**
- Best value performance indicators**
- Code of practice on workforce matters**

Foreword

Foreword by Keith R Mitchell CBE, Leader of the Council and Joanna Simons, Chief Executive



As we write this we are reflecting on an economic world that has changed over the past twelve months in ways that few of us could have predicted and although some experts are now reporting encouraging signs, we think it safe to assume that the biggest topic on many people's minds remains the recession. Over the past twelve months the crisis has affected every individual and every business institution and though local government played no part in the recession's creation, it has certainly been a victim. "So what does all of this mean for this council and for you, the people it serves? It means we'll have to work even harder, and even smarter, to maintain the excellent services we provide, to be transparent, to provide value for money and to be innovative. It means we face the same challenging times as any large organisation in this environment and we must rise to that challenge. We are confident that we have the vision to do that, and the high-quality, dedicated staff to continue delivering. That is our commitment to you in the year ahead." Exactly how these things will affect us as a county council in terms of future funding still remains to be seen, but in the meantime our over-riding responsibility has been to work closely with partner organisations to keep Oxfordshire's public services running (and running well), however hard we have all been buffeted by the economic storm. Small businesses and their staff are the lifeblood of the local economy. We took the view that the better we could support them, the better shape our county would be in to recover and move on.

Happily the recession has not deflected us from getting on with implementing our other plans - or from delivering a whole series of top-performing services over the year. We have won praise and awards and at the same time rolled our sleeves up to address things that need additional focus. **Transform Oxford** is our response to the long-held concerns of residents, businesses and visitors about the centre of Oxford - in particular the balance between good access and public transport systems and a better pedestrian experience. It is widely agreed that there are too many buses running straight through the city centre and Transform Oxford is an exciting project to - literally - transform things. At the same time we have worked on improving another key service area - **educational attainment** - by investing targeted attention on struggling schools and schools that are judged to be 'coasting' and on improving our internal structures by completely re-shaping the Children, Young People and Families Directorate. Encouragingly, the most recent inspection news from the Audit Commission very much endorses our progress in the past twelve months. Inspectors looking at our overall performance have judged us to be a three star (good) council that is delivering sound services. Fire and rescue and environmental services scored top marks and the council's financial management and use of resources, and adult social care services, were singled out for particular praise.

Performance highlights

The 2008 Comprehensive Performance Assessment of Oxfordshire County Council by the Audit Commission rated this a good council with promising prospects for yet more improvement.

Managing your money

We got the best score possible - four out of four - for the way we managed budgets, and were judged to be in a robust position to deliver our plans and deal with the current economic downturn. We were previously graded at three out of four.

Education

Progress is being made in GCSE attainment, schools attendance had increased and the number of exclusions was below national averages. However more improvement is needed at all school examination levels.



Staff sickness

Our record on low staff sickness was one of the best in England.

Best value

We were judged to be one of the best councils in the country for meeting government-set 'best value' performance indicators.

Emergency response

Our Fire and Rescue Service has been assessed as delivering an excellent response to all types of emergencies.

Spending

We achieved good performance across a range of services for a relatively low spend.

Traffic congestion

Efforts to reduce traffic congestion were highlighted - with a particular mention for the high numbers of people using public transport.

Climate change

Our strong response to the flooding in the summer of 2007 and in early 2008 was noted for the robustness of our plans to prepare for the effects of climate change.



Recycling

We were praised for the way we have exceeded targets to recycle more.

Adult social care

We were said to be providing positive outcomes across all care groups.

Consultation

We were judged to have outstanding arrangements for consulting young people & children, including travellers, asylum seekers, looked after children and those with learning difficulties.

The full report will soon be available at
www.audit-commission.gov.uk

How we set our ambitions and priorities

Oxfordshire is renowned as a great place to live and work. Part of this appeal lies in the county's diversity in terms of large settlements, small communities, its outstanding natural landscape and architectural heritage, and an economy that spans everything from the most traditional rural activities to the most advanced 21st century technology.

Planning a sustainable future that properly embraces all of these elements is an exciting challenge that requires effective partnerships at regional, countywide and local level. The Oxfordshire Partnership provides a clear framework, through a strategy called Oxfordshire 2030.

We also try to always reflect the views of the county's citizens and stakeholders.

We actively use the feedback we receive from our wide range of consultation and community engagement exercises to help set our priorities and to drive improvements to our services. Examples of this include our annual budget consultation exercise, large-scale opinion surveys, consultation with our 3,000 member Citizens' Panel and feedback from our Sounding Boards.

Our website has a consultation page www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ consultation where the details of council consultations are provided.

These and previous surveys helped us to develop "Low Taxes, Real Choice and Value for Money" as our over-arching *aims* and you can see how these have been applied in practice through the following examples:

LOW TAXES

We have continued to keep council tax rises low.

REAL CHOICE

We have adopted a system whereby people receiving a council service such as care support no longer need to receive that care from the council, but can opt instead to receive a cash sum and arrange their own care to best suit their needs.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Our Fire and Rescue service is the fourth best value for money fire service in England.

The council's **priorities**, again developed around the issues people told us were most important to them, are:

**WORLD CLASS ECONOMY
TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE
HEALTHY AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES
BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES**



World-class economy

Oxfordshire is a key player in south east England's 'engine room' of economically successful counties. Despite the global economic turbulence, the county has remained prosperous and unemployment has continued to be low, thanks amongst other things to its high level of research and development activity, solid concentration of top high-tech industry, thriving publishing houses and world renowned universities. The council's focus has been - and will continue to be - to support the county's economy and help it to retain its status as one of the fastest growing economies in the United Kingdom.

What we do. The county council supports the local economy through providing:

- Education and training
- Advice and support to businesses
- Investment in new infrastructure such as transport systems and public buildings
- Strategic planning

Spotlight on Oxford

Challenge - To improve access to the city and reduce bus congestion within the city centre and enhance the pedestrian experience.

What we've done Transform Oxford project

In October 2008 the council launched exciting plans to transform the centre of Oxford's streets, to consolidate the city as a world class economic centre while enhancing its status as a world heritage site.

The council had been concerned that there were too many buses, dirty cluttered streets and poor quality paving, and Transform Oxford was devised to create:

- excellent access for all
- great shopping

- exciting spaces
- a safe environment
- cleaner air.

The first phase - to improve Queen Street - will be implemented this year.

What we've done West End project

The regeneration of the West End of the city - that began with the award-winning regeneration of the castle site - has continued. The county council supported the refurbishment of Bonn Square and is backing the continued development of plans for the Westgate and beyond, although the 2008 timetable for the re-development of the Westgate Centre has been delayed by the credit crunch.



Spotlight on

The recession

Challenge - Even before the recession the global economy was in the midst of long term change with the rapid growth of the Asian economies, in particular those of China and India. To ensure our long term prosperity Oxfordshire's economy must be able to compete.

What we've done - A package of support for businesses and individuals who have lost their jobs

- We buy over half our supplies and services from small and medium-sized companies and made sure we pay our bills faster to help keep money flowing.
- We made parking free at all of Oxford's five park and ride sites and provided some free bus travel to Christmas shoppers.
- Our Trading Standards officers toured the county offering free credit and debt advice and supported a BBC 'debt busting' outside broadcast.

- We joined the Regional Development Agency and Oxford City Council in pledging support to BMW agency workers who had lost their jobs.
- We launched a 'Buy with confidence' scheme that lists reputable local traders and expanded our 'Rogue Trader' scheme to protect vulnerable people from unscrupulous conmen and traders.
- We supported job clubs in two badly affected areas of the county - Banbury and East Oxford.
- We have strengthened the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership.
- We invested in Venturefest, that has helped create hundreds of high-tech jobs and generate millions of pounds of investment in sectors that are vital to our economy's future.
- We have led work to promote Oxfordshire as the place to locate and grow a business.
- We published extensive information on our website, advising businesses and individuals of their rights and responsibilities and signposting them to government agencies offering support.
- We have funded work to provide support and advice to new businesses to help them innovate and grow.





Environment and climate change

Oxfordshire has three areas of outstanding natural beauty and is south east England's most rural county. The Cotswold town of Burford in west Oxfordshire was recently voted one of the top ten most idyllic places to live in Europe. There is much to celebrate and protect, and, as the dramatic summer floods of 2007 showed only too clearly, climate change has the potential to pose huge additional challenges. The county council works to deliver sustainable services that will help the county to grow and thrive, while at the same time protect its important natural heritage.

What we do

- Strategic planning
- Waste management and recycling
- Countryside services
- Roads and transport
- Property services
- Emergency planning

Spotlight on Ecotown proposals

Challenge - In late 2007 the government announced plans for a series of 'ecotowns' across England. One of these was near Weston on the Green in Oxfordshire. The county council shared others' doubts about the plan's viability.

What we've done - As soon as the Oxfordshire ecotown was announced the county council - in partnership with Cherwell District Council - began working on its own study into the feasibility of the proposal.

This led to a report that has been sent to the government highlighting many flaws, both in terms of the likely negative effect of the ecotown on the nearby local economy, and the potential transport problems.

Among other things, the report showed:

- The toll for travelling in and out of the eco-town at peak times by car could work out at over £7,000 a year.
- The proposal for a new town could cause serious additional congestion on the already congested A34, thus impacting on the local economy.
- The ecotown developers have yet to provide validated assessments of the rail link proposals.



Spotlight on Waste, recycling and carbon management

Challenge - All councils are under pressure to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill and they face increasing financial penalties. Many European countries already recycle far more than England and also use technologies to burn waste to create electricity. Scientists and governments around the world say that all councils have a vital role to play in cutting the greenhouse gas emissions believed to be responsible for climate change.

What we've done - Compared to other counties in England, Oxfordshire is making good progress in increasing recycling.

In 2008/09 we recycled and/or composted over 43 per cent of our waste - well above the UK average.

We have now agreed a strategy for reducing waste growth still further through the Oxfordshire Joint Municipal Waste Strategy that has set the following targets:

- Reduce waste growth to zero per cent per person by 2012.
- Increase recycling and composting rates to 55 per cent by 2019/20.

The council is also currently considering bids for a waste-to-energy incinerator to be sited in either Ardley in north Oxfordshire or Sutton Courtenay in the Vale of White Horse and it has:



- Made £700,000 improvements to Oakley Wood Recycling Centre near Wallingford.
- Signed a deal to recycle Oxfordshire's food waste.

What we've done - We set ourselves a target of cutting our own CO₂ emissions by 18 per cent by 2012, through our 'Future First' programme.

Our Future First action plan for 2008/9 committed us to the following actions:

Property - Reduce energy consumption in existing county council buildings. Minimise carbon emissions from new buildings or refurbishments.

Street lighting - Reduce energy consumption from street lighting.

Travel - Reduce carbon emissions from business mileage.

Waste and resources - Reduce waste to landfill from OCC buildings and activities. Increase provision and use of recycling facilities to cover all major sites and buildings.

Water - Reduce water use from Council buildings and activities.

In addition we are working with Oxfordshire businesses to help them reduce their own carbon footprints and have also:

- provided support to local food and sustainable produce groups
- run schemes to help reduce plastic bag use in several Oxfordshire market towns.



Healthy and thriving communities

Although Oxfordshire is widely perceived to be a prosperous county with comparatively few social problems, there are areas of significant deprivation and many rural communities with limited access to public services. One of the council's key priorities is to make it as easy as possible for everyone in the county to access and thus reduce isolation and break the cycle of deprivation.

What we do

- Care for older people and people with disabilities
- Services for children and families
- Education services
- Public protection

Spotlight on Adult social care

Challenge - Oxfordshire's demography is changing. Figures show that growth in the 85-plus population in Oxfordshire during the next 25 years will more than double, increasing by more than 14,000 people.

What we've done - We have been judged to be performing well in delivering adult social care. We have focused in particular on helping people to maintain their independence, for example through the use of Telecare and through other innovative schemes, tailored to individual groups.

We have been rated as 'excellent' for the choices we offer older and disabled people living in care homes, with more home support and a high take-up of direct payments.

We have also been working hard to deliver extra care housing - in partnership with district councils - to try to stimulate the market to allow people to live in their homes for longer.

Other achievements include:

- Mental health day services reviewed to provide greater focus on the result for the individual (including personal development plans).
- Other county day services for older people are being extended and modernised to model the successful Bicester Resource and Well-Being Centre.
- Dial-A-Ride service for people with disabilities and mobility impairments secured for at least three years thanks to the partnership working of four local authorities.
- Work to further assist people with dementia.
- A new initiative launched to give Oxfordshire people a greater say in the running of local health and social care services.
- Adult social care provided by Oxfordshire County Council received the second-highest possible rating following an in-depth assessment by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.
- Arrangements to protect vulnerable adults from abuse or neglect strengthened.



Spotlight on Safeguarding children

Challenge - The report on the death of Baby P in Haringey has again focused attention on arrangements that councils have in place to safeguard children.

What we've done - We have established an effective Safeguarding Children's Board ahead of the recommendations made by Lord Laming in his report on Baby P, invested in more social workers and a scheme for newly qualified social workers. We have also strongly improved our performance on adoption and looked after children, including good quality care placements.

Services have been reorganised into locality teams, making it easier to focus on early intervention and supporting individual families.

Disadvantaged school students are being supported to take part in more activities, for example by being provided with the equipment needed for a residential trip. The funding is equivalent to £300 per eligible pupil and has led to improved attendance, attitude and attainment.

Childcare for young disabled people is also more accessible, through an appropriately-staffed childminder network, a brokerage service and other information and support services.





Better public services

The county council is committed to providing the best possible public services, both through the services we deliver direct to communities and those we provide in conjunction with partners and other stakeholders.

What we do. This council is responsible for delivering 80% of local government services in the county.

These include:

- Care for older people and people with disabilities
- Children's services (including schools)
- Countryside services
- Education services
- Fire and rescue services
- Libraries and museums
- Roads
- Trading Standards
- Waste management and recycling

Spotlight on Efficiency

Challenge - Every council service is reviewed regularly by independent inspectors and the council itself is subject to Audit Commission inspections.

What we've done - We are expecting to have achieved our targets of making over £11 million of efficiency savings in 2008/9.

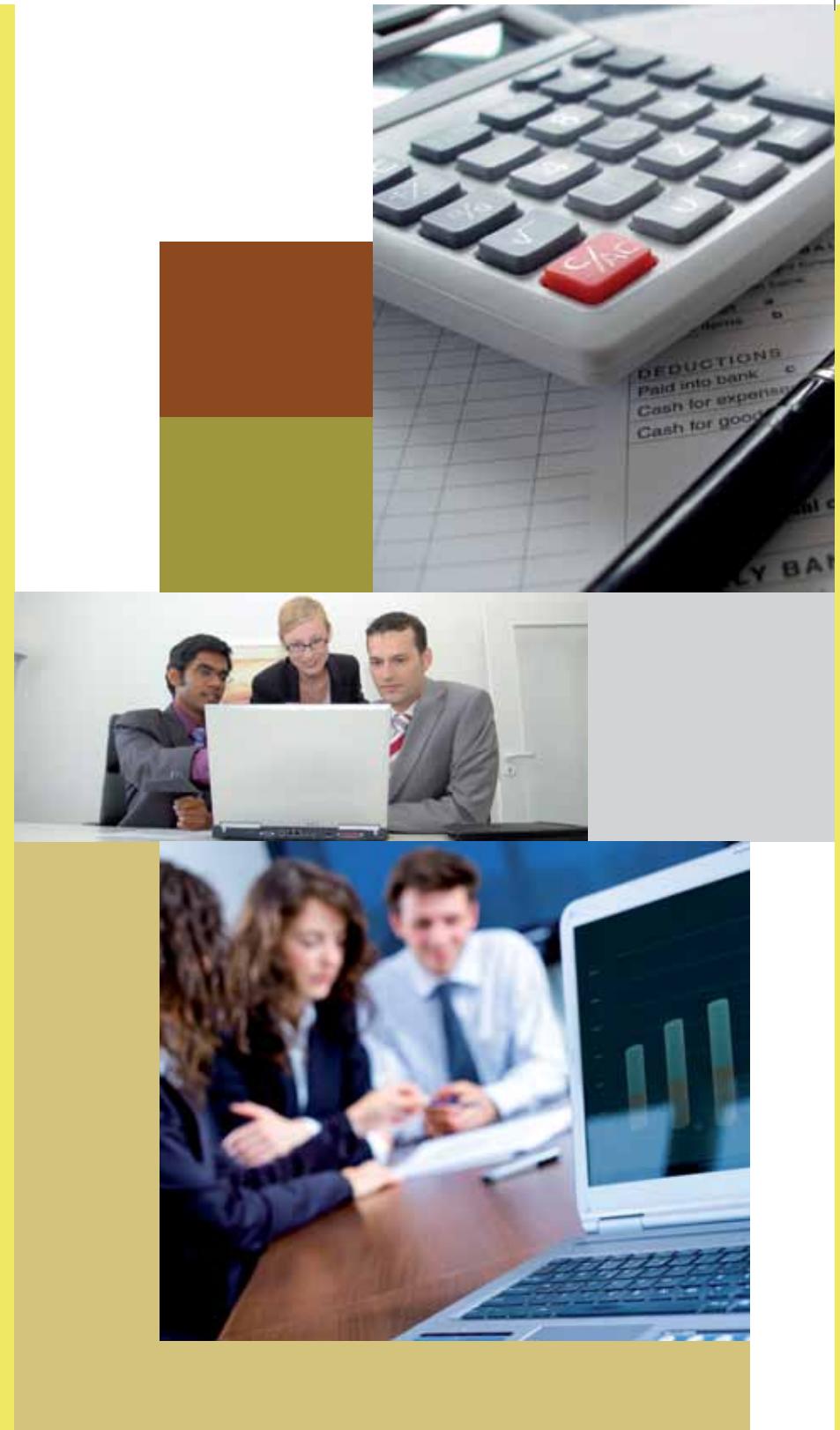
Oxfordshire was the first county council to be awarded a Charter Mark for excellence in customer service for the whole organisation. We have also retained our Investors in People status.

The Audit Commission has judged the council to have a 'robust policy framework for promoting equality, access and customer engagement'.

The council received the highest possible award for its use of resources, meaning we have a robust and efficient financial management framework. However, we continue to look for greater efficiencies, better ways of working and thoroughly monitor our transactions and services.

The council has formed a shared services centre with ambitious targets to save £27 million over eight years. In the second year we have saved £4 million.

Oxfordshire is the leading authority in the use of pooled budget arrangements – meaning shared resources between the council and the Primary Care Trust, which results in simpler arrangements, better outcomes for people and greater savings.



Spotlight on Educational attainment

Challenge - Oxfordshire has faced challenges in terms of educational attainment. Results were low compared with results from similar counties.

What we've done - We have established a Raising Achievement Service to support schools that need to improve and now assign each a School Improvement Partner to act as a critical professional friend and help plan effective change. The service also provides additional special needs support and specialist teaching staff to help raise standards.

We are also working to raise attainment still further among the county's higher achieving schools and pupils through the Gifted and Talented Programme.

We are committed to 'Narrowing the Gap' of educational achievement between our most vulnerable children and young people and their peers. This is being achieved in a number of ways, including the innovative Success Project which focuses on groups that are under achieving because of social and emotional difficulties. This project, as with other strands of our work, relies on close co-operation between us, schools and other partners and a shared commitment to raising all pupils' achievement.



Oxfordshire now has fourteen schools rated as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, thanks in part to the hard work of staff and schools in 2008/9.

A schedule of school building improvements is underway to ensure all schools have the appropriate facilities to provide the best opportunities for learning and deliver a diverse curriculum.

Other achievements:

- School exam results are improving with the number of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grade A-C rising by 2.3% (1.4% higher than the national average).
- Combe Primary School voted joint top primary school in England in national primary school league tables.
- £34 million spent on new and improved school buildings, children's centres and outdoor learning centres.
- Designed, developed and delivered apprenticeships in Social Care, Civil Engineering, Administration and Outdoor Education with 95% completing their qualifications and all of these moving on to jobs or further education.
- Teams restructured to protect vulnerable children.
- £33 million secured for the new Oxford Academy on the site of the former Peers school, with initial works underway.

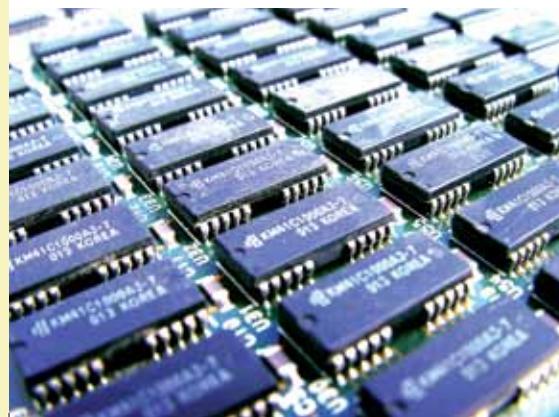
Spotlight on Youth offending

Challenge - Public attitude surveys regularly demonstrate that youth offending is a major source of concern to some Oxfordshire communities, even where the offences are minor and/or crime is in fact very low.

What we've done - A series of initiatives, such as the Phoenix Scheme to promote self discipline and confidence by young offenders via our Fire & Rescue Service, has contributed to:

- a 30% reduction in the number of new entrants into the criminal justice system aged 10-17
- a fall in youth re-offending
- fewer convictions
- a reduction in harm caused by alcohol and illegal drugs.





The Cabinet

The council operates a leader/cabinet model of political management. The cabinet meets every month and makes all the council's key decisions. The cabinet is drawn from the controlling group and comprises 10 members, each with specific portfolio responsibilities. Current members of the cabinet and their respective portfolios are shown below.

Role	Cabinet member	Main areas of responsibility
Leader of the Council	 Councillor Keith Mitchell CBE	Corporate and community leadership; corporate strategies; strategic communication; Oxfordshire Partnership; economic development and tourism; regional issues; skills; Oxford City liaison and local strategic partnership.
Deputy Leader of the Council	 Councillor David Robertson	Council policy co-ordination; council business management; Public Service Board and Local Area Agreement; Change Programme; West Oxfordshire liaison and local strategic partnership.
Cabinet Member for Finance	 Councillor Charles Shouler	Finance; procurement; property; Cherwell liaison and local strategic partnership.
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families	 Councillor Louise Chapman	Children's Services: Services for children, young people and families including lead responsibility for educational policy; preventative services; child protection; family support; breaking the cycle of deprivation; youth service and youth justice.
Cabinet Member for Community Safety	 Councillor Judith Heathcoat	Community safety; anti-social behavior; crime and the fear of crime; fire and rescue; consumer protection; emergency planning; police issues; coroner's service; Gypsies and Travellers; drugs and alcohol awareness; Vale of White Horse liaison and local strategic partnership.

Role

Cabinet Member
for Place

Cabinet Member
for Sustainable
Development

Cabinet Member for
Social and Community
Services

Cabinet Member for
Schools Improvement

Cabinet Member
for Transport

Cabinet member

**Councillor
Melinda Tilley**



**Councillor
Roger Belson**



**Councillor
Jim Couchman**



**Councillor
Michael Waine**



**Councillor
Ian Hudspeth**

Main areas of responsibility

Localities-focused work; community cohesion; equalities and social inclusion; voluntary and community sector.

Regional planning and local development framework; housing; waste management; environmental management; Clean and Green; climate change; archaeology; access to the countryside South Oxfordshire liaison and local strategic partnership.

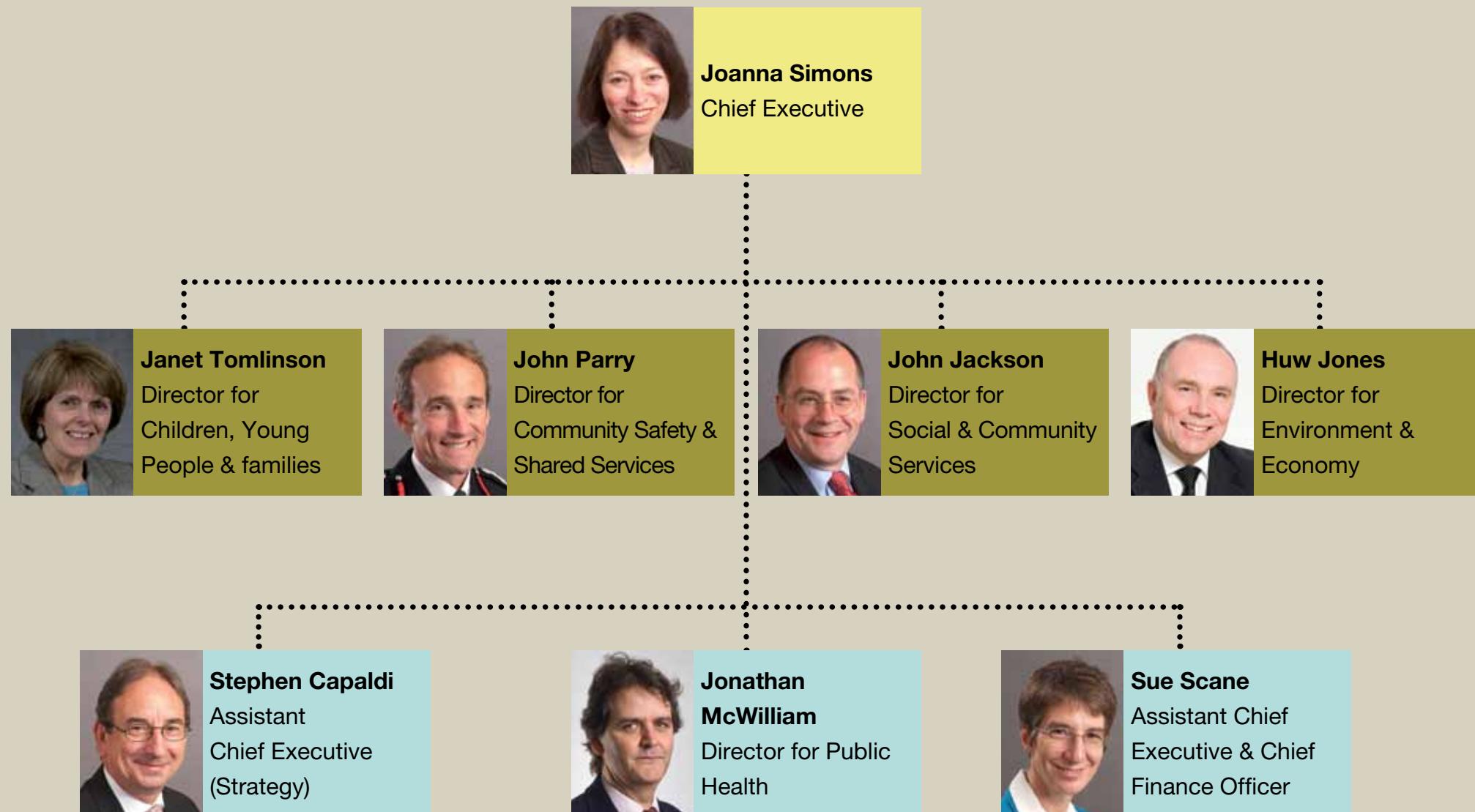
Adult social services; health issues; adult learning; libraries; museums and heritage; the arts; archives; leisure and recreation; registration service and the music service.

Primary and secondary schools; special education; pupil services and school transport.

Strategic planning; implementation of schemes for transport; highways; traffic and parking; road safety; public passenger transport and flooding.

The County Council Management Team

The county council's services are delivered through four directorates, each led by a strategic director. The County Council Management Team (CCMT) comprises the Chief Executive, four service directors, the Assistant Chief Executives and the Director of Public Health. The members of CCMT are shown below.



Summary of accounts 2008/09

If you have any comments or inquiries
about this report, please email
ask@oxfordshire.gov.uk

or write to
FREEPOST
Oxfordshire County Council
(no further address required)

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