

County Council

9 December 2025

Agenda



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

To: Members of the County COUNCIL

Notice of a Meeting of the County Council

Tuesday, 9 December 2025 at 10.30 am

Council Chamber - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#). Please note, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Reeves".

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

December 2025

Committee Officer: **Democratic Services**
E-mail: CommitteesDemocraticServices@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1. Minutes (Pages 1 - 12)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025 (**CC1**) and to receive information arising from them.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest - see guidance note

Members are reminded that they must declare their interests orally at the meeting and specify (a) the nature of the interest and (b) which items on the agenda are the relevant items. This applies also to items where members have interests by virtue of their membership of a district council in Oxfordshire.

Members should also note that at the Annual Council meeting on 20 May 2025, general dispensations to speak and vote on certain items were granted to all Oxfordshire County Council Members including:

- Determining an allowance (including special responsibility allowances), travelling expense, payment or indemnity given to Members

4. Official Communications

5. Appointments

To make any changes to the membership of scrutiny and other committees on the nomination of political groups and to note any changes to the Cabinet made by the Leader of the Council.

6. 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.

7. Questions with Notice from Members of the Public

The deadline to submit questions is 9am, five working days before the meeting i.e. 9am Tuesday 2 December 2025.

8. Questions with Notice from Members of the Council

9. Report of the Cabinet (Pages 13 - 18)

Report by the Leader of the Council.

The report includes items at the Cabinet meetings on 13 November 2025 and 18 November 2025.

10. The Calendar of Council Meetings 2026-27 (Pages 19 - 22)

Report of the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

COUNCIL IS RECOMMENDED

to note that the Chair of the Council will consult with Political Group Leaders on a proposal to bring the Council meeting originally scheduled for 7 July 2026 forwards to 30 June 2026 in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 2.1. This is in order to avoid a clash with the Local Government Association Annual Conference.

11. Devolution for Oxfordshire (Pages 23 - 40)

Report by the Chief Executive

This report seeks Council's endorsement for Cabinet to approve the decision that Oxfordshire submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to Government for a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), attached as Annex B. This item is scheduled to be received for approval by Cabinet immediately following the rising of the Council meeting.

Council is RECOMMENDED to

- a) NOTE the draft Cabinet report (Annex A)**
- b) RECOMMEND to Cabinet that it approves the submission of the Expression of Interest (EOI) (Annex B) to Government.**

12. Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Reports 2024/25 (Pages 41 - 60)

Report by the Director of HR and Cultural Change

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 stipulate that all businesses, public sector and third sector organisations with over 250 employees must publicly report on average pay differences between their male and female employees.

Unlike the gender pay gap, the Council is not legally required to publish its ethnicity pay gap. However, positive steps have been taken to measure and be transparent about the Council's performance in this area.

Council is RECOMMENDED to

- a) **Note Oxfordshire County Council's statutory Gender Pay Gap report of 2025 and approve it for onward submission to the Gender Pay Gap Service by 31 March 2026.**
- b) **Note the Council's voluntary Ethnicity Pay Gap report of 2025.**
- c) **Agree to the publishing of both reports on the Council's website by 31 March 2026.**

13. Treasury Management Mid-term Review (Pages 61 - 76)

Report by the Executive Director of Resources & Section 151 Officer

This report sets out the position at 30 September 2025. Throughout the report, the performance for the first half of the year to September 2025 is measured against the budget agreed by Council in February 2025.

Council is RECOMMENDED to note the council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2025/26.

14. Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (Pages 77 - 102)

Report by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Each year, Full Council is required to adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances to apply from 1 April of the following year. In particular, it must set the amount of a Basic Allowance payable to all members and may make payments for Special Responsibility and Co-opted Members' Allowances. Accordingly, this report asks members to adopt a Scheme of Allowances to apply from 1 April 2026.

The Council is RECOMMENDED to adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances for the financial year 2026/27, and in so doing to consider the following options, either:

- 1) **To adopt the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel made in November 2025 and as set out in Annex 1 to this report; OR**

- 2) To adopt any particular recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel as the Council may determine; OR
- 3) To agree alternative values for any of the allowances, as the Council may determine; OR
- 4) If the Council does not wish to accept the Panel's recommendations at this time, in whole or in part, or to substitute alternative amounts, to agree a status quo Scheme of Allowances for 2026/27 for any unchanged aspect; AND
- 5) That in any event, the Council adopts an annual index for a four year period (whereby if no other changes occur to a Scheme, then the Members' Allowances may increase in relation to that index for a period of no more than four years), and that this should relate (as in previous years) to the annual pay award for local government staff. If adopted, the increase will be in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect.

15. Review of Member Champions (Pages 103 - 114)

Report from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

This report proposes some changes to the role and function of Member Champions and clarifies the appointment process for future Member Champions.

Council is RECOMMENDED to:

amend the Council's Constitution to replace part 8.5, Member Champion Role with the text in Appendix 2.

MOTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

WOULD MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE THAT ANY AMENDMENTS TO MOTIONS WITH NOTICE MUST BE PRESENTED TO THE PROPER OFFICER IN WRITING BY 9.00 AM ON THE FRIDAY BEFORE THE MEETING

16. Motion from Councillor Gavin McLauchlan

Council notes that in July 2025 a judicial review upheld the Secretary Of State for the Environment's decision to approve the proposed Thames Water Resources Management Plan which includes the South East Strategic Reservoir Option in Abingdon.

As a result, Thames Water has to have an Emergency Discharge facility in place including the ability to empty the reservoir at a rate of 1 metre per day, possibly over a period of 3 to 4 weeks. This would put water back into the Thames at a rate of 75 m³/s

just south of Abingdon c.3x greater than its normal flow.

Such a discharge could cause havoc along the Thames, endangering Life, residences, businesses, wildlife and the environment, yet there is no requirement for the reservoir operator to have an emergency plan before building the reservoir, only before filling it. Dealing with the emergency in the wider area will be the responsibility of this Council as the local emergency planning authority along with the emergency services.

This Council makes clear its deep concern that we could be made responsible by default for safely managing such an emergency, leaving us with impossible decisions about which lives, homes and businesses to save in a crisis situation.

We therefore call on the Leader to write to the Secretary of State to request clarity on how such an emergency discharge would be managed and to provide a commitment that we will be provided with the resources to do so before any Development Consent Order is considered.

17. Motion from Councillor Maggie Filipova-Rivers

Council notes that:

- Oxfordshire residents have endured successive crises in recent years: Covid, the cost-of-living emergency, underfunding of public services by successive governments, leaving many residents in precarious situations, creating a climate of uncertainty and fear.
- Research shows that rising inequality fuels support for far-right movements, eroding trust in institutions and creating fertile ground for scapegoating and division.
- Against this backdrop, right-wing media and far-right groups have wrongly blamed migrant communities to further their agendas.
- Extensive research, including the Migration Observatory's 2024 study, finds that migration contributes positively to the UK economy by expanding the labour force, addressing skill shortages, and supporting productivity and growth, with little evidence of wage suppression for native workers. Migrants' net fiscal impact is generally positive, with greater contributions in taxes than cost to public services.
- Oxfordshire is proud to be the first County Council of Sanctuary, committed to ensuring that everyone who lives here, whether newly arrived or long settled, is treated fairly.

Council therefore resolves to:

- Recognise the risks to our communities if the disinformation, suspicion, and intolerance disinformation generates go unchallenged, and commit to addressing them wherever they occur.
- Work with partners to ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone in our communities and that racism is confronted wherever it occurs, in schools, workplaces, and on our streets.
- Request that Cabinet supports the co-production of a community cohesion action plan with key stakeholders in consultation with councillors, including actions to support community-led dialogue and ensure appropriate resourcing is considered during budget setting.

Note: The motion, if passed, would constitute the exercise of an executive function in which case it will be referred to the Cabinet together with any advice the Council may wish to give, in accordance with Rule 13.5.1 (i) of the Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution.

18. Motion from Councillor Liz Brighthouse

This Council being deeply concerned by the impact of poor mental health on adults and children in the County asks the Health and Wellbeing Board to request the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to investigate and report back to them and to the County Council on how Mental Health services provided by Oxford Health and other organisations are tackling this issue.

Such an investigation of issues needs to include addressing accessibility to services including

- Prevention
- Assessment
- Therapeutic support
- Medication
- Emergency intervention such as "sectioning"
- Inpatient beds

How these issues impact on other public services such Community Safety, Public Health, Housing, Schools, Fire and Rescue and the Police also needs to be assessed and understood. Most of all poor mental health impacts on individuals, families, and communities around the County and this must be addressed.

Council requests that the outcome of the investigation be sent to the appropriate Secretaries of State.

19. Motion from Councillor James Plumb

Council notes that:

- November is Men's Health Awareness Month ("Movember"), raising awareness of key issues affecting men and boys, including mental health, suicide prevention, prostate cancer, and testicular cancer.
- Men across Oxfordshire, as nationally, continue to experience significant health challenges, including lower healthy life expectancy and a greater likelihood of living more years in poor health.
- Men are statistically less likely to seek help for both physical and mental health issues. This is especially true in rural communities, where access to services may be more limited and traditional stigma around help-seeking can be stronger.
- Men continue to account for the majority of suicide deaths, demonstrating the urgent need for early intervention, better support, and improved signposting to local services.

Council welcomes the work already taking place across Oxfordshire to support men's physical and mental health.

Council resolves to:

1. Request Cabinet to recognise November each year as “Men’s Health Month in Oxfordshire”, working with NHS partners, veteran groups, charities, and community organisations to promote awareness, early intervention, and personal responsibility for health and wellbeing.
2. Request Cabinet to seek a standalone report from the Director of Public Health on men’s health outcomes in Oxfordshire, including mental health, suicide prevention, cancer awareness, rural and urban access to services, and practical recommendations that strengthen early help and reduce health inequalities.
3. Ask the Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care giving this council’s support for the introduction of the government’s National Men’s Health Strategy.

Note: The motion, if passed, would constitute the exercise of an executive function in which case it will be referred to the Cabinet together with any advice the Council may wish to give, in accordance with Rule 13.5.1 (i) of the Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution.

20. Cross-party Motion from Councillor Nathan Ley, seconded by Councillor James Barlow

Pride in the appearance of the public realm is important to our residents. Clean and well-maintained pavements make people feel good about their neighbourhood, reduce accidents, and prevent more costly problems later. Neglect leads to uneven footways, hazards for those with mobility difficulties, and higher long-term repair bills.

Routine weed clearance on county pavements was part of highways maintenance until 2007/08, when budget cuts removed the programme. Some parishes now commission their own weed spraying and may be using glyphosate, increasingly opposed by residents because of its risks to health, pets, rivers, and biodiversity. Other parishes are now beginning to trial alternative approaches.

Council resolves to:

1. Note the historic withdrawal of routine weed clearance and the resulting concerns about accessibility, safety, and neighbourhood appearance.
2. Recognise the Council’s statutory duty to keep pavements free of hazards, and that neglect increases both risks and costs.
3. Request Cabinet to seek an officer report with options for re-establishing pavement weed clearance and scheduled maintenance, including alternatives to glyphosate, and how the Council can support towns and parishes to reduce reliance on chemical spraying.
4. Request that the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation give due consideration to the findings of this report as part of the next round of budget setting.

Note: The motion, if passed, would constitute the exercise of an executive function in

which case it will be referred to the Cabinet together with any advice the Council may wish to give, in accordance with Rule 13.5.1 (i) of the Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution.

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.

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.

Agenda Item 1

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 4 November 2025 commencing at 11.00 am and finishing at 4.10 pm

Present:

Councillor Mark Lygo – in the Chair

Councillors:

Ted Fenton (Vice-Chair)	James Fry	Kieron Mallon
Thomas Ashby	Andrew Gant	Emma Markham
Brad Baines	Emma Garnett	Gavin McLauchlan
James Barlow	Sean Gaul	Lesley McLean
Ron Batstone	Stefan Gawrysiak	Ian Middleton
Tim Bearder	Andy Graham	Toyah Overton
Will Boucher-Giles	Tom Greenaway	Glynis Phillips
Chris Brant	Kate Gregory	James Plumb
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Jane Hanna OBE	Susanna Pressel
Mark Cherry	Jenny Hannaby	Leigh Rawlins
Andrew Coles	David Henwood	Judy Roberts
Nicholas Michael Cotter	Georgina Heritage	James Robertshaw
Dr Izzy Creed	Ben Higgins	Paul-Austin Sargent
Andrew Crichton	David Hingley	Geoff Saul
Hao Du	Johnny Hope-Smith	Roz Smith
Imade Edosomwan	Robin Jones	Ian Snowdon
Judith Edwards	Emily Kerr	Peter Stevens
Gareth Epps	Dan Levy	Bethia Thomas
Lee Evans	Dr Nathan Ley	Liam Walker
Neil Fawcett	Diana Lugova	Tony Worgan
Maggie Filipova-Rivers	Saj Malik	

The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

78/25 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2025 were approved.

79/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillors Field-Johnson, Fletcher, Gordon and Leffman.

80/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

81/25 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 4)

The Chair thanked His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant, Mrs Marjorie Glasgow, for addressing Council Members before this meeting commenced.

The County had been honoured to have visits from the Prince and Princess of Wales and Princess Royal in October.

A list of events attended by the Chair, Vice-Chair and past chairs since the last Council meeting was attached to the Schedule of Business in Annex 1.

The Chair recalled that on 6 October, the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the European Union, Lindsay Appleby, came to Oxfordshire to build connections with local firms that he will use to boost investment and trade with the EU. The Ambassador remarked afterwards that it had been the best organised visit he had participated in. The Chair thanked staff who made that occasion possible.

The Chair noted that November was Men's Mental Health Awareness Month. International Men's Day was to be marked in County Hall on 19 November. That day aims to highlight the positive contributions of men to society, raise awareness about men's health issues, and promote gender equality.

The Chair also thanked everyone who came to the second charity quiz, held on 22 October, which raised £253 for his chosen charities: OXSRAD, Abingdon RDA, and Oxford United in the Community. The Chair's Charity Christmas Quiz will take place in Common Hall from 4 pm on Wednesday, 3 December.

The Chair's Christmas Carol Service will take place at St Nicholas Church in Marston from 6.30 pm on Monday, 15 December.

82/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 5)

The Chair accepted the following requests to present a petition or speak on an item on the agenda:

Petitions

Brenda Boardman 'Transport Hub at Oxford Rail Station'

Brenda Boardman presented a petition with 1,240 signatures, representing Oxon4Buses, advocating for the inclusion of a bus hub in the redevelopment plans for Oxford rail station. The petition highlighted that Network Rail's

tender for the station redevelopment omitted bus facilities. The petition called for a bus hub that is physically and visually linked to the rail station, enabling seamless transfer between train and bus for passengers.

Councillor Roberts, Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action, welcomed the petition and confirmed the Council's policy to prioritise active travel modes and bus connections at Oxford Station, with minimal car parking. Network Rail's consultant brief now included aspirations for a new transport interchange to enhance bus-rail transition. Council officers will continue collaborating with Network Rail, Oxford City Council, bus companies, and user groups to ensure the station design reflects the Council's transport hierarchy and user needs. Councillor Roberts added that an early meeting with the appointed architect and transport engineers was planned to discuss user group engagement.

Public Address

Item 15 Motion from Councillor Walker

Richard Parnham
Danny Yee
Thaila Carr
Bernadette Evans
Paul Major
Anne Gwinnett
Lydia Jansson
Robin Tucker
Emily Scaysbrook
Geoffrey Sutton

Any speeches provided to the Council are published alongside these minutes.

83/25 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(Agenda Item 6)

Twenty seven questions were asked. The questions, responses and supplementary questions and responses are recorded in an Annex below.

84/25 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 7)

Sixty three questions were asked. The questions, responses and supplementary questions and responses are recorded in an Annex below.

85/25 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 8)

Council was asked to consider a report regarding the current vacancy on the Planning and Regulation Committee and also addressing any similar vacancies in the future.

The Liberal Democrat group was entitled to seven of the twelve positions on the Planning and Regulation Committee. However, only six Members had been appointed by the political group leader leaving one vacancy on the committee. Under the legislation, it fell to Council to fill the current vacancy.

The report also proposed that Council delegate to all council committees the authority to appoint to its future vacant committee seats in the event that a political group has not expressed its wishes in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Councillor Lugova moved the recommendations in the report and nominated Councillor Gawrysiak for the vacant position on the Planning and Regulation Committee. Councillor Worgan seconded the recommendations and the nomination.

The Chair explained that, because Councillor Gawrysiak was not a member of the Liberal Democrat group, Council would also have to approve the resulting variation of the political balance on the Committee with no votes against in accordance with Section 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The Chair also clarified that any abstentions on this vote would not count as votes against.

Following discussion, the proposal to appoint Councillor Gawrysiak and vary the political balance on the Committee was put to a vote and approved with 2 abstentions and no votes against.

Recommendation b) was put to a vote and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED (with 2 abstentions and no Member voting against):

- **to appoint Councillor Stefan Gawrysiak to the vacant position on the Planning and Regulation Committee in accordance with the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, Regulation 15;**
- **to agree, with no votes against, to vary the political proportionality on the Committee in accordance with Section 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.**

RESOLVED (unanimously):

- **to delegate to all council committees the authority to appoint to its vacant committee seats in accordance with legislation if a political group fails to make a nomination.**

86/25 REPORT OF THE CABINET

(Agenda Item 9)

Council received the report of Cabinet covering its meetings for 10 September 2025, 16 September 2025 and 21 October 2025.

On Item 1: Strategic Plan

Councillor Baines asked how the proposals by the administration will be more ambitious than that required and funded by central government in regard to establishing new Best Start Family Hubs. Councillor Fawcett responded on behalf of the Leader and said he will ask Councillor Leffman to respond in writing and indicated that it was planned to put additional resource into family hubs.

Councillor Phillips asked how it was concluded that the strategic plan was aligned with the residents' priorities when none of the primary or secondary priorities listed by residents made any reference to being greener. Councillor Fawcett responded that the consultation response was part of the evidence base that was looked at in drawing up the strategic plan and that the mandate for the majority administration was based on climate change and making Oxfordshire greener.

Item 3: Oxford temporary congestion charges

Councillor Pressel asked why there was such a short lead time in the period for the implementation of the congestion charge and why some of the information leaflets were not distributed on time. Councillor Gant responded that the leaflets were delivered very efficiently. The Councillor further responded that it was appropriate to deliver the benefits of this scheme as soon as possible, which is what had been done.

Councillor Baines asked what plans were in place to monitor any modal shift from driving to cycling during the operation of the temporary congestion charge and what steps would be taken if the resultant shift was below the levels required to deliver the target reduction in car journeys. Councillor Gant responded that precise changes from one mode to the other, particularly with cycling and pedestrians, was difficult to measure. He further responded that these schemes did not exist in isolation, and the ambition was to create a better county by making everybody's journeys better.

Councillor Fry asked that with growing evidence of resignations among badly needed school and hospital staff, would the cabinet member give urgent consideration to extending permit exemptions to these workers, if their employers support such exemption, to staunch the outflow of valuable staff. Councillor Gant responded that he would request that the evidence of resignations be provided to him. He further responded that access to Oxford hospital sites was central to the policy, and that one cannot get the benefits unless one supports the policies.

Councillor Graham asked how many applications have been received for exemptions and if he could ensure that officers responded to these exemptions. Councillor Gant responded that the figure was around 63,000 altogether of which around 50,000 were from within Oxford and Oxfordshire. He further said that the officers in customer services do a brilliant job.

Councillor Brighouse asked for discussions to be held with ambulance authorities and various organisations that operate ambulances around the city because it was virtually impossible for many people on the eastern

bypass to try and move out of their way. The Councillor further asked if congestion was being monitored. Councillor Gant responded that the impact of the scheme would be monitored very carefully and verified and audited by external contractors. The Councillor further said that he cannot possibly comment on the individual experience of a particular ambulance on a particular road but he was happy to continue discussions.

Councillor Brant asked about the progress on Oxford's new congestion charges and the response of bus companies. Councillor Gant responded that he could not comment on behalf of the bus companies but that the uptake of the Free Park and Rides had been substantial.

Councillor Malik asked about tackling congestion which now sits on Marsh Lane instead of the Marston Ferry Road where there is a charge. He further asked as to how the congestion would be dealt with when people were travelling to get to the eastern bypass and avoid the charge on Hollow Way. Councillor Gant responded that the system was carefully designed by expert officers over a very long period and that it was not about certain roads but about managing the way traffic moves around the city as a whole.

Item 4: Future Bus Regulation Options

Councillor Epps asked what government support was being made available towards purchasing bus fleets and depots. Councillor Gant responded that there was no support from central government.

Councillor Baines asked, with regard to the £150,000 that would pay for a detailed franchising plan and detailed proposals for franchising, could the cabinet member outline what had become of this funding and why it was not spent as agreed by Council. Councillor Gant responded that it had been spent and that £150,000 did not come anywhere near the cost of a franchising assessment or the implementation.

Councillor Middleton asked about the problem that non-profitable rural routes cannot be subsidised by the Council because it does not reap the benefits from the more profitable routes which have been franchised to private companies. Councillor Gant responded that the partnership with the bus companies was very successful, including the payment for electric buses.

Councillor Garnett noted that in Oxfordshire congestion charge revenues were effectively handed over to the bus companies, but the Council does not have a direct say in what service will be run. Councillor Gant responded that the bus companies provided the biggest share of investment which was a good deal and that the review of the bus franchising model will be a matter for any possible future Mayoral Combined Authority.

Councillor Fry asked if revenues raised by congestion charges will be directed towards services such as the 17 bus route, under Enhanced Partnership Plus. Councillor Gant responded that regular meetings were held with bus companies on routes.

Councillor Malik asked if Councillor Gant would use his influence to provide residents of Cowley with a bus service from the east to the north of the city. Councillor Gant said that some of the improved services already announced by the bus companies were as a direct result of the congestion charge policy and he was happy to talk to the councillor about his proposal.

Item 5: Update to the Street Lighting and Illuminated Assets Policy with respect to Part Night Lighting

Councillor Cherry asked about the part time lighting consultation and the anxiety it caused. Councillor Roberts responded that officers together with councillors would have to determine that the night time lighting policy was suitable.

Councillor Pressel noted that the plans for street lighting were supposed to benefit wildlife, but LED lighting was actually bad for wildlife. She asked why the Council had introduced it. Councillor Roberts responded that, with regard to LED lighting, it depended on what wavelengths were used in the lights and not all of them were bad for wildlife.

Councillor Fry asked that motion-activated lighting be included as one of the options during local consultation. Councillor Roberts responded that motion-activated lighting was not available, and the costs would need to be determined before that system could be implemented.

Councillor Creed asked about the impact of night lighting on the safety of young women. Councillor Roberts responded that those safety concerns were important and that everyone in an area would have to agree for this lighting option to happen.

Councillor Rawlins asked that a proactive approach be undertaken to appropriate parish councils based on the officers' judgement, as suggested by the scrutiny committee, by specifically writing to identified parishes with a proposal seeking support. Councillor Roberts responded that it should be seen how the policy lands before encouraging people in areas where it would seem appropriate to at least look at it and engage with them as to whether there is an interest in the area.

Item 6: Oxfordshire County Council's Biodiversity Action Framework and Action Plan

Councillor Pressel asked why there was no reference to working with schools. Councillor Roberts responded that work was being undertaken with schools that were local authority schools and that they had actually implemented a lot of carbon saving projects with them by putting photovoltaic cells on their roofs. The Councillor further said that it will need be checked with the officers whether it is within the scope of the framework and action plan.

Councillor Barlow asked what actions Councillor Roberts will be asking each cabinet member to take to ensure biodiversity targets were embedded in each of their portfolios and thus delivering the 43 actions in an integrated

way across the Council. Councillor Roberts responded that if there were any specific actions that need to be looked at, she will take those away to the officers.

Councillor Garnett asked that runaway road building be stopped in the county and stated that better public transport for new housing developments was needed. It was essential for preserving biodiversity. Councillor Roberts responded that that was the aim of most of the local transport connectivity plan and the Council was trying very hard to repurpose parts of the network and to increase all of the transport schemes.

Councillor Fry asked if, in relation to biodiversity, the Council could give priority to schemes that generated benefits in a short period and were more easily verified, even if more costly. Councillor Roberts responded that most of the biodiversity gain was actually funded by developers with very clear-cut legal requirements and, on those, the funding cannot be adjusted. Furthermore, the Council was keen to increase biodiversity right across the county.

The agenda item was concluded by the Chair on reaching the constitutional time limit of 30 minutes as set out in CPR 2.4.

87/25 STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028

(Agenda Item 10)

Council had before it the Strategic Plan which had been developed following the county council elections in May 2025 and the formation of a new administration. The period of this plan will be November 2025 to 1 April 2028.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Fawcett, Deputy Leader of the Council, and seconded by Councillor Gaul.

Following discussion, an electronic vote was taken. The recommendation was approved with 39 votes in favour, 12 against and 12 abstentions.

RESOLVED: to approve and adopt the Strategic Plan 2025-28.

88/25 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

(Agenda Item 11)

Council considered a report on the Financial Regulations proposing to update Section 5 of the Financial Regulations which sets out the arrangements for capital expenditure and which required updating to align with the threshold for a Key Decision

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Levy and seconded by Councillor Fawcett.

Following discussion, the recommendations were approved with 3 abstentions.

RESOLVED to approve:

a) amendments to Section 5 of the Financial Regulations increasing the limit for Cabinet approval for new inclusions and variations to capital schemes from £1.0m to £2.0m to align with the key decision threshold of £2m.

b) that in exceptional circumstances up to £0.500m funding for exploratory feasibility works can be approved by the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer (following discussion and recommendation at, and with the support of the Strategic Capital and Commercial Board).

89/25 YOUTH JUSTICE ANNUAL PLAN 2025-26

(Agenda Item 12)

Council had before it a report recommending the adoption of the Youth Justice Annual Plan for 2025/26. The plan must outline progress against the previous year's priorities, performance data, set out a plan for the forthcoming year and how the partnership is meeting its statutory responsibilities against the Youth Justice National Standards for Children and the national Key Performance Indicators.

The recommendation was moved by Councillor Gaul and seconded by Councillor Fawcett.

Following discussion, the recommendation was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: to adopt Oxfordshire's Annual Youth Justice Plan 2025-2026.

90/25 USE OF SPECIAL URGENCY

(Agenda Item 13)

Council was asked to note the use of Special Urgency for a Key Decision taken on 1 September 2025 by the Leader of the Council on the funding of Woodeaton Manor Academy.

The report was moved by Councillor Fawcett, Deputy Leader of the Council and seconded by Councillor Levy.

Following discussion, Council noted the report.

91/25 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2026/27

(Agenda Item 14)

The calendar of meetings for the 2026/27 civic year, from one Annual Council meeting to the next, was presented to Council for approval.

The recommendation was moved by the Chair who noted that the proposed dates took account of school holidays and that important religious dates for the main religions represented in the UK had also been taken into consideration.

The recommendation was seconded by the Vice-Chair and agreed.

RESOLVED: to approve the calendar of meetings for the 2026-27 Council Year attached to the report as Annex 1.

92/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR LIAM WALKER

(Agenda Item 15)

The following motion was proposed by Councillor Walker and seconded by Councillor Henwood.

“This Council notes:

The strong opposition from some residents, businesses, and key workers to the Oxford Congestion Charge scheme and their ongoing concerns about its impact on the cost of living, local trade, and access to services across Oxford.

This Council believes:

The scheme is unfair, harmful to the local economy, and does not have public support and it's time to end the scheme.

This Council therefore resolves to:

Call on the Leader and Cabinet to immediately end the operation of the Oxford Congestion Charge scheme and ensure no further expansion or reintroduction of similar charging schemes without full public consultation and support.”

Following discussion, Councillor Walker called for a named vote and was supported by at least six other councillors as required under Council Procedure Rule 17.4.1.

The motion was lost with 22 votes in favour, 36 against and 2 abstentions.

Council voted as follows:

For the motion –

Councillors Ashby, Baines, Brighouse, Cherry, Coles, Creed, Crichton, Du, Edosomwan, Evans, Fry, Henwood, Lygo, Malik, Mallon, Phillips, Plumb, Pressel, Robertshaw, Saul, Snowdon and Walker.

Against the motion –

Councillors Barlow, Batstone, Bearder, Brant, Cotter, Edwards, Epps, Fawcett, Filipova-Rivers, Gant, Garnett, Gaul, Gawrysiak, Graham, Greenaway, Gregory, Hanna, Hannaby, Heritage, Higgins, Hingley, Hope-Smith, Jones, Levy, Ley, Lugova, McLauchlan, McLean, Middleton, Overton, Rawlins, Roberts, Smith, Stevens, Thomas and Worgan.

Abstentions:

Councillors Boucher-Giles and Markham.

93/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR GAVIN MCLAUCHLAN

(Agenda Item 16)

The time being 4.00 pm, this motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

94/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR NATHAN LEY

(Agenda Item 17)

The time being 4.00 pm, this motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

95/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR LIZ BRIGHOUSE

(Agenda Item 18)

The time being 4.00 pm, this motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

96/25 MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR MAGGIE FILIPOVA-RIVERS

(Agenda Item 19)

The time being 4.00 pm, this motion was considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

This page is intentionally left blank

Divisions- N/A

COUNTY COUNCIL – 9 December 2025

REPORT OF THE CABINET

Cabinet Member: Leader

1. Local Government Reorganisation – Submission of Proposal to Government

(Cabinet, 13 November 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report presenting Oxfordshire County Council's proposal for local government reorganisation, recommending a single unitary authority for Oxfordshire. The proposal aims to create a streamlined, cost-effective local government structure for the County that meets government criteria and local needs.

On 5 February 2025, the government invited Oxfordshire councils to submit proposals for local government reorganisation by 28 November 2025, with interim plans due by 21 March 2025. The single unitary council aims to provide a unified front for services across Oxfordshire, enhancing strategic and economic planning, delivering value-for-money services, and supporting the county's economic potential.

The report outlined extensive public and stakeholder consultations, including over 2,000 responses, and engagement with businesses and voluntary organisations, shaping the proposal and planning further input during statutory consultation.

Cabinet members emphasised the advantages of a single unitary authority in financial resilience, service integration, and strategic planning, with projected financial savings.

Cabinet agreed on amendments to the submission including councillor numbers set at 99, enhanced financial risk analysis, refined stakeholder feedback representation, and further development of area committees, and approved the proposal for submission to government by the November 28, 2025 deadline.

2. Review of Member Champions

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received a report outlining proposed updates to the role, function, and appointment process of Member Champions within Oxfordshire County Council, aiming to clarify responsibilities and improve governance.

Member Champions support Cabinet Members and the Leader by focusing on specific interest areas, engaging stakeholders, and highlighting significant matters,

without decision-making powers or remuneration. Current roles cover areas like Active Travel, Public Transport, Mental Health, and Youth Justice.

Cabinet approved the recommendations and referred the required constitutional changes to the Audit and Governance Committee and Council.

Cabinet Member: Resources and Deputy Leader

3. HR and Cultural Change - Quarterly Employee Data Report - Quarter 2 2025-26

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received an update on the implementation of the Our People and Culture Strategy, noting minor changes in staffing, continued success with apprenticeships, and ongoing efforts to manage agency costs.

The report noted a slight increase in directly employed staff due to improved recruitment, a minor increase in agency costs in hard-to-recruit areas, and a commitment to reducing agency spend over time.

Cabinet noted the report.

Cabinet Member: Finance, Property and Transformation

4. Treasury Management Mid-Term Review 2025-26

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

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 received the second report for the 2025/26 financial year which set out the position at 30 September 2025.

Cabinet noted the report which highlighted that the Council has received above budgeted investment returns due to higher cash balances and interest rates, had maintained a cautious approach to new debt, and continued to prioritise security and liquidity. The negative Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) balance was forecast to reach £153 million, resulting in a £6 million cost in lost interest, with the Council awaiting government action to address the deficit.

5. Budget and Business Planning Report 2026/27 - 2030/31

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet had before it the Budget and Business Planning Report covering the period 2026/27 to 2030/31, with a capital programme extending to 2035/36. It outlined the council's financial strategy, budget assumptions, funding outlook, and the process for setting a balanced budget amid significant financial uncertainty and reform in local government funding.

Cabinet noted the report and initial position for the 2026/27 budget and approved a medium-term financial strategy covering five years (up to 2030/31) and a capital programme extending ten years (to 2035/36). Members acknowledged the budget and business planning timeline, next steps, and possible effects of a delayed Fair Funding Review 2.0 outcome.

6. Business Management & Monitoring Report - Performance and Risk Quarter 2 2025/26

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet noted a report which provided an overview of the Council's performance and strategic risks for Quarter 2 of the 2025/26 financial year, highlighting key risk areas and performance measures. The report included 47 performance measures, with particular attention to areas requiring action.

7. Capital Programme Approvals - November 2025

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received a report requesting budget approval to increase funding for the A4130 Steventon Lights project within the council's capital programme for 2025/2026. Cabinet approved an increase to the budget from £10.8 million to £13.318 million, an increase of £2.518 million, to support accelerated utility works, enhanced contingencies, and updated construction cost estimates

Cabinet Member: Children and Young People

8. Response to motion by Councillor Creed on Children's Centres

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received a report proposing a response to Councillor Creed's motion on supporting community-operated children's centres and the development of family hubs which had been passed at the meeting of the Council on 9 September 2025.

The Council received funds from the Best Start Family Hubs Development grant for 2025/26, with further funding expected, and had allocated an additional £1 million to support services for under-5s, aiming to improve early education and child development.

A multi-agency programme board, including social care, health, education, and the voluntary sector, was guiding the development of family hubs, with a commitment to collaborate with community-run children's centres.

Cabinet approved the response to the motion.

Cabinet Member: Public Health and Inequalities

9. Response to motion by Councillor Hanna on Healthwatch Oxfordshire

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received a report proposing a response to a motion regarding the future of Healthwatch Oxfordshire passed at the meeting of the Council on 9 September 2025.

The response acknowledged the concerns raised about the abolition of Healthwatch and committed to working with Healthwatch to map services and maintain independent community engagement during the implementation of neighbourhood health plans under the Government's 10-year health strategy.

Cabinet approved the response to the motion.

Cabinet Member: Place, Environment and Climate Action

10. Proposed changes to the Waste Acceptance Policy (WAP) for Oxfordshire's household waste recycling centres (HWRCs)

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report which recommended changes to the Household Waste and Recycling centre policy, including minor adjustments to opening hours, introduction of booking systems, and new charges for out-of-county users and asbestos disposal, following a large public consultation.

Cabinet approved the recommendations which would improve environmental performance, operational efficiency, and financial sustainability of the HWRC network.

11. Carbon Management Plan Residual Carbon and Offsetting Policy

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received a report on Oxfordshire County Council's Carbon Management Plan (CMP), which focussed on residual carbon emissions and the strategy for offsetting to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. It outlined the need for carbon credit

purchases, the rationale for terminology, and the approach to local market development and governance.

Cabinet approved the recommendations and noted that the offsetting policy supported the council's climate emergency ambitions, promotes local business growth in carbon removal, addressed inequalities such as fuel poverty, and enhanced access to nature through nature-based projects.

12. OxRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail strategy

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received a report recommending approval of the OXRAIL 2040, a strategic rail transport plan for Oxfordshire covering the next 15 years. The plan is designed to integrate with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and aims to improve rail connectivity, support economic growth, and address climate action and place shaping priorities within the county.

Key priorities include expanding capacity at Oxford station, electrification and freight decarbonisation, the Oxfordshire Metro concept, and new stations to improve access to jobs and housing.

Cabinet welcomed the proposals outlined in the plan and approved the recommendations.

13. Scrutiny Reports

(Cabinet, 18 November 2025)

Cabinet received the following Scrutiny reports:-

- a) Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee report on Business Management and Monitoring Report (with a focus on Children, Education and Families)

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Reports on

- b) Verge and Vegetation Management
- c) OXRAIL 2040: Plan for Rail Strategy

LIZ LEFFMAN

Leader of the Council

November 2025

This page is intentionally left blank

Division(s): N/A

COUNCIL – 9 December 2025

THE CALENDAR OF COUNCIL MEETINGS 2026-27

Report of the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

COUNCIL IS RECOMMENDED

to note that the Chair of the Council will consult with Political Group Leaders on a proposal to bring the Council meeting originally scheduled for 7 July 2026 forwards to 30 June 2026 in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 2.1. This is in order to avoid a clash with the Local Government Association Annual Conference.

Executive Summary

1. The Annual Conference of the Local Government Association has been arranged for 7 to 9 July 2026. The Political Group Leaders, a number of cabinet members and the Chief Executive and Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer are usually invited to attend this important conference every year. It is therefore proposed to bring the Council meeting forwards one week to Tuesday 30 June 2026.
2. As a meeting of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee was originally scheduled for 30 June 2026, officers will consult with the Chair of the committee on a proposal to bring that forwards one week to Tuesday 23 June 2026.

Alternative option

3. If the Council meeting was moved back one week to 14 July 2026, then a meeting of Cabinet which has been scheduled for that date would also have to be moved back a week. That meeting would then fall in the school holidays. It is the Council's policy to avoid meetings in the school holidays wherever possible.

Financial Implications

4. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report which is asking Council to note the process.

Comments approved by:
Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

Legal Implications

5. The Constitution sets out the rules relating to the timing of Council meetings:
Part 3.1 - Council Procedure Rule 2.1

“Ordinary meetings of the Council will normally take place on the:

- a) third Tuesday in February (the budget meeting);
- b) first Tuesday in April;
- c) second Tuesday in July;
- d) second Tuesday in September;
- e) first Tuesday in November
- f) second Tuesday in December each year.

In all cases, the Chair may determine otherwise after consultation with Group Leaders.”

This report is to notify Members that this consultation is to take place.

Comments approved by: Anita Bradley, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, Anita.Bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Equality and Inclusion Implications

6. In setting out the calendar of meetings, the school holidays have been avoided as far as possible as many Members have extra child-minding responsibilities during the holidays.
7. Important religious holidays for the main religions represented in the UK population have also been taken into consideration, that is Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jewish.
8. This is to ensure that meetings of the Council are inclusive.

Sustainability Implications

9. There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this report

Risk Management

10. There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report.

Anita Bradley
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: None

Contact Officers: Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Democratic Services Manager
Email colm.ocaomhanaigh@oxfordshire.gov.uk

December 2025

This page is intentionally left blank

COUNCIL 9 DECEMBER 2025

DEVOLUTION FOR OXFORDSHIRE Report by the Chief Executive

Recommendation

1. **Council is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) NOTE the draft Cabinet report (Annex A)
 - b) RECOMMEND to Cabinet that it approves the submission of the Expression of Interest (EOI) (Annex B) to Government.

Executive Summary

2. This report seeks Council's endorsement for Cabinet to approve the decision that Oxfordshire submit an **Expression of Interest (EOI)** to Government for a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA), attached as Annex B. This item is scheduled to be received for approval by Cabinet immediately following the rising of the Council meeting.
3. The EOI is an early-stage invitation to Government to engage in discussions. It is different to our Local Government Reorganisation proposal which is a final proposal. The EOI will initiate discussion which will lead to Government to decide, firstly, whether it will accept us onto the devolution priority programme and if so initiate work to define the proposal which will lead to engagement and decisions by this Council at a later stage. At this stage, no final decisions are being made; instead, the Council is seeking to understand Government's requirements and expectations, with a commitment to make informed decisions once these are clarified through ongoing dialogue.

Key Points for Cabinet Decision

4. The Cabinet report attached as Annex A identifies that Cabinet are asked to:
 - **Confirm commitment to devolution** as a strategic approach for Oxfordshire.

- **Agree that a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) offers potential benefits** for the region, including stronger regional collaboration and access to additional powers and funding.
 - **Support further engagement with Government** to explore what an MCA could achieve for Oxfordshire and the wider region.
5. The EOI represents a **joint proposal agreed by leaders across Oxfordshire and the wider region**. It reflects a shared ambition for greater local control and improved outcomes for residents.
6. Devolution could bring **enhanced powers and resources** for local leaders around transport, housing, skills, and economic development. An MSA would provide a **formal governance structure** to deliver these benefits collaboratively.

Next Steps

7. If Government accepts the EOI, detailed negotiations will follow. This will include opportunities for **further scrutiny and engagement** to shape the final deal.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

8. The County Council's Corporate Plan sets out a vision for a "greener, fairer, healthier Oxfordshire," with strategic priorities around climate action, reducing inequality, improving health and wellbeing, and supporting inclusive economic growth.
9. Table 1 below sets out potential contributions and outcomes that could be delivered through the formation of an MSA.

Table 1	
Strategic Priority	MSA Contribution & Outcomes
Greener Oxfordshire	Regional climate action, integrated transport, green infrastructure, improved air quality.
Fairer Oxfordshire	Inclusive growth, more affordable housing, better skills and employment support, reduced inequality.
Healthier Oxfordshire	Joined-up health and care, reduced health inequalities, improved wellbeing.

Financial Implications

10. All financial implications are included within Annex A (the Cabinet report).

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance
Kathy.Wilcox@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

11. All legal implications are included within Annex A (the Cabinet report).

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Anita.Bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Martin Reeves, Chief Executive Officer

Annex A:	Report to Cabinet
Annex B:	TV Devolution EOI Letter

This page is intentionally left blank

CABINET
09 December 2025

DEVOLUTION FOR OXFORDSHIRE

Report of the Chief Executive

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Endorse the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions and agree to continue building on the collaborative approach across the region to date.
- b) Approve the Expression of Interest (EOI), attached as Appendix 1, to be submitted by Oxfordshire County Council as the upper-tier authority to Government, noting that the EOI is designed to proactively position our region for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme.
- c) Acknowledge the EOI as an initial invitation to Government, opening further dialogue and engagement, and not a decision to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- d) Agree that a further report will be brought to Cabinet prior to any final decision by Government on the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- e) Note the informal Devolution Board will oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.

Executive Summary

- 2. This report seeks approval to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI), attached as Appendix 1, to Government. This is in response to the release of the Government's Devolution white paper and subsequent English devolution and community empowerment bill. It seeks to position our region in the next round of devolution for the purpose of creating a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). The EOI represents an initial, exploratory step—serving as an invitation to Government to engage in further discussions about the opportunity of establishing an MSA for our region. At this stage, no final decisions are being made; instead, the Council is seeking to understand Government's requirements and expectations, with a commitment to make informed decisions once these are clarified through ongoing dialogue.
- 3. The primary purpose of pursuing an MSA is to provide the support network for the innovation eco-system that drives economic growth through innovation, sustainability, and prosperity. Working within a strategic partnership can

leverage our region's strengths. By providing collaborative regional governance, this Council can provide a framework to promote inclusive growth for our area for the benefit and wellbeing of our residents.

4. The principle of devolution is well-established, with Government aiming to redistribute political, social and economic power across England. With ambition now focused on universal coverage of Strategic Authorities across England following the English Devolution White Paper and the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, Leaders have been meeting across our region to explore the opportunity for devolution.
5. The Government's vision, as set out in the English Devolution White Paper, is for all parts of England to be part of regional Strategic Authorities led by a regional Mayor. These authorities will drive growth, shape public services, and deliver strategic leadership in areas such as economic growth and sustainability, planning, skills, employment, and transport.
6. This move to devolving power to regions signals a significant step change in how UK economic growth will be delivered. It places significant shift in how local government needs to develop and deliver its economic growth strategies. This will shift relations from central government to local regional strategic partnerships, working with an elected Mayor within a Strategic Authority. It will require council Leaders, supported by their Chief Executives, to form new strategic regional partnerships to drive our ambitions for place based all-inclusive growth.

A Thames Valley MSA For Collective Regional Growth

7. Becoming an MSA represents a significant opportunity for regions in England to drive inclusive growth and prosperity for communities and businesses. With new powers and investment, MSAs can address strategic economic challenges and opportunities, in collaboration with local Leaders, business leaders and investors, with Government and increasingly, with other Strategic Authorities as part of the Council of the Nations and Regions. This is a new and exciting platform in our regional and local government landscape, creating systems based on collaboration and collective action that can work at scale to make connections, drive innovation and support growth.
8. However, failing to pursue this opportunity carries real risks. Areas that do not secure an MSA risk missing out on funding, influence, the ability to set their own strategic direction, and deliver against regional priorities. In an increasingly devolved landscape, inaction could result in diminished competitiveness, slower growth, and reduced leverage in regional and national decision-making around investment.

Regional Economy

9. The Thames Valley economy is one of the most dynamic and globally connected in the United Kingdom contributing billions in Gross Value Added to

the national economy each year. On a per-person basis, it ranks second only to London, a reflection of the area's powerful concentration of high-value industries and skilled workforce.

10. The Thames Valley Region's prosperity has its roots in knowledge and innovation, driven by digital technology, communications, life sciences, biotech, and health including creative and professional service sectors that have flourished thanks to the regions connectivity and proximity to London and Heathrow Airport. Global companies have long chosen to locate in the region with recognised hubs for technology and business services. This includes fast growing sectors in pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and digital.
11. This region's economy has a critical mass of science, learning, talent, intellect and inspiration. The region also has a culture of pushing boundaries, redefining leading edge, pioneering and entrepreneurship. The universities are powerhouses of knowledge and beacons of experimental excellence as indeed are many of the businesses located across the county.
12. The intellectual capacity of the region and talent emerging from the universities is driving the establishment of spin out businesses and the scale up of growing ones, contributing to an environment that promotes and nurtures commercialisation; a driving force for a new, science and knowledge led industrial revolution.

Regional Risk of Economic Decline

13. Despite a track record of success, the Thames Valley economy has not been immune to the decline in productivity across the UK in recent years, suffering from underinvestment and increased global competition. In addition, continued prosperity brings challenges, including housing affordability, infrastructure constraints, and uneven growth across localities.
14. There are considerable challenges for residents and businesses in generating a future proof transport infrastructure that supports the region's economic growth, which is struggling to cope with increased demand. Education and skill need to be developed on a regional collaborative basis to power capacity for economic growth.
15. This means this region needs to take a lead in ensuring sustainable housing and transport, promoting green technology, repowering the economy, developing the regional connectivity and attracting inward investment. The region could do much more to benefit from the advantages generated through strategic growth planning and collaboration at a much greater scale that can be currently delivered by individual councils.
16. This places the Thames Valley under threat of seeing economic decline as businesses and inward investment risks diverting to regions that have clear joined up regional Growth Plans and unfragmented governance arrangements, selling the region's benefits to sectors and investors.

17. Areas that can deliver regional transportation connectivity, housing growth and other business support infrastructure such as skills training and wellbeing are better placed to secure investment.

The Opportunity

18. There are substantial benefits in seeking devolution of powers. Devolved control over adult education and skills budgets allows authorities to better align training provision with the needs of local industries from digital technology and life sciences to creative industries, helping retain talent and businesses whilst ensuring inclusive access to opportunities.
19. Devolved powers and responsibility over strategic transport, strategic housing and spatial planning will support growth at a wider regional level enabling authorities to better target investment in deprived or underperforming areas, address housing affordability, promote green infrastructure and ensure growth benefits reach all communities. A regional transport strategy would future proof the region's rail links, while improving access to Heathrow and London. Coordinated investment in rail, bus, and sustainable transport would reduce travel times, improve productivity and support the net zero agenda.
20. An enhanced ability to attract private investment and innovation partnerships would support the development of the innovation ecosystem in key sectors such as IT to stem the current exodus of UK innovation overseas and help to attract more overseas investment to the region. A science partnership could form a knowledge-intensive growth region with a stronger national and international identity capable of competing with major European economic clusters.
21. As a key driver of the UK economy, an MSA has the potential to scale up rapidly and deliver significant regional and national economic growth. Establishing an MSA will function as catalyst for growth to target funding and skills programmes where they are needed most, helping to reverse productivity decline and remove barriers to economic development.
22. Stronger coordination through an agreed MSA regional growth plan, influenced and led by local authorities, will stimulate a larger, integrated economy that can carry more weight in negotiations with Government, securing devolved funding and national infrastructure investment. It would also present a more compelling 'investment ready' proposition to global investors seeking a region that combines cutting-edge research with commercial capability.

Expression of Interest Thames Valley Vision

23. To unlock the opportunity for an MSA, it is proposed to submit an EOI to Government. The EOI emphasises the region's strengths in innovation and productivity and its readiness to enter discussions for an MSA. Devolution will drive inclusive growth and unlock significant opportunities for local communities and the UK more broadly.
24. The Thames Valley EOI highlights:

- **Economic rationale:** The region has national excellence and/or international excellence in at least 5 of the 8 key business sectors highlighted in the Modern Industrial Strategy. The Strategic Authority would provide the framework that allows businesses to leverage those sectors across a wider geography and create jobs. Our intent is to restore growth to pre-Covid levels of prosperity.
 - **Collaborative governance:** There is a commitment to partnership working across constituent councils, with clear terms of reference and for the EOI to mark the start of wider stakeholder engagement across the region.
 - **Strategic powers and funding:** Powers over transport, skills, housing, and economic development and the ability to provide these within a business eco-system will lead to greater investment.
 - **Place-based leadership:** Greater local control to deliver national policy objectives at local level has been shown to be successful in other established Strategic Authority areas. Adapting powers and functions to meet local needs strengthens local identity, accountability, and the ability to deliver tailored solutions for residents.
25. The EOI is the first stage towards devolution. Whilst it does not bind any Council to an MSA at this stage, it does indicate our readiness to engage further.
26. Oversight of the proposals will be through a Devolution Board made up of elected representatives from each participating Council.

Next Steps

27. The following show our key areas of focus in next phase: -
- **Submission of the EOI** (subject to approval) to Government by 19 December 2025, followed by further engagement and refinement based on feedback from Leaders, Chief Executives, and stakeholders.
 - **Ongoing governance and oversight** via the Devolution Board, with regular updates to Cabinet and public consultation as the process evolves.
 - **Build the proposal** through regular engagement, agreeing our geography and the size and scale of the MSA based upon criteria set out in the Devolution White Paper as follows:
 - - **Scale:** Strategic Authorities should be of comparable size to existing institutions. The default assumption is for them to have a combined population of 1.5 million or above.
 - **Economies:** Strategic Authorities must cover sensible economic geographies with a particular focus on functional economic areas, reflecting current and potential travel-to-work patterns and local labour markets. It is likely that where travel to work areas are small and fragmented, Strategic Authorities will cover multiple travel to work areas.

- Contiguity: Any proposed geography must be contiguous across its constituent councils (either now or with a clear plan to ensure continuity in the future through agreed local government reorganisation).
- No 'devolution islands': Geographies must not create devolution 'islands' by leaving areas which are too small to go it alone or which do not have natural partners.
- Delivery: Geographies should ensure the effective delivery of key functions including Spatial Development Strategies, Local Transport Plans and Get Britain Working Plans.
- Alignment: The government will seek to promote alignment between devolution boundaries and other public sector boundaries.
- Identity: A vital element of successful devolution is the ability for residents to engage with and hold their devolved institutions to account – and local identity plays a key role in this.
- **Stakeholder engagement** with residents, businesses and public sector partners to explore devolution for our region.
- **Finalise proposal** with further decisions made at key points by Cabinet supported by Scrutiny.

Analysis and consideration of alternative options

28. The White Paper is clear that the Government intends that all of England be devolved by default and is committed to ending the deals-based approach. The Government will also legislate for a ministerial directive, which will enable it to directly create Strategic Authorities in any places where local leaders in that region have not been able to agree how to access devolved powers. Therefore the “do nothing” option could mean Government legislating on our behalf for devolution.
29. Opting to begin further discussions with Government on devolution would allow the Council to lead the definition of the MSA for our region. This will provide choice over the geography and the ability to determine the key priorities for our area.
30. Should this Council consent to an MSA at a future meeting, the mayor would have a seat at the Council of Nations and the Regions influencing government policy and ensuring local community voice is heard.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

31. The County Council's Corporate Plan sets out a vision for a “greener, fairer, healthier Oxfordshire,” with strategic priorities around climate action, reducing inequality, improving health and wellbeing, and supporting inclusive economic growth.
32. Table 1 below sets out potential contributions and outcomes that could be delivered through the formation of an MSA.

Table 1	
Strategic Priority	MSA Contribution & Outcomes
Greener Oxfordshire	Regional climate action, integrated transport, green infrastructure, improved air quality.
Fairer Oxfordshire	Inclusive growth, more affordable housing, better skills and employment support, reduced inequality.
Healthier Oxfordshire	Joined-up health and care, reduced health inequalities, improved wellbeing.

Financial Implications

33. Oxfordshire County Council has already committed £10 million from earmarked reserves, which can be used towards the cost of local government reform and devolution (£1.2 million of which will be used for devolution). To date the costs of devolution have been limited to the costs of the Programme Director role and consultants advising on the economic analysis. These costs are shared amongst the Councils participating in discussions on devolution.
34. There are no direct financial implications arising from the submission of the EOI. As discussions with Government proceed the opportunity will arise to explore how growth in our economy could create significant social and economic uplift for our area and indeed, for the whole country. The Thames Valley is a positive contributor to HM Treasury.
35. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation offer an opportunity to reset local government finances. In this context, the EOI submission seeks discussions with Government on developing innovative fiscal solutions to support investment into the Thames Valley Region. This reference to investment funding will also look to develop a more self-sufficient strategic authority that is not reliant on revenue gainshare and seeks inward investment through the private sector and funding institutions, as part of any regional investment strategy.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, Kathy.Wilcox@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

36. The submission of an EOI to open discussions with Government on devolution is an executive decision of Oxfordshire County Council as the upper-tier authority. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (The Act), Section 45 allows for areas to collaborate to create new strategic authorities. The Act, Section 46 requires constituent councils to consent to devolution, which is defined in the Act, Section 10(11) as including only upper-tier councils. This Council has participated in all discussions regarding devolution for Oxfordshire and the wider region.

37. The English Devolution and Communities Empowerment Bill is currently under consideration by Parliament. It sets out seven competencies for MSAs: transport & local infrastructure; skills and employment support; housing and strategic planning; economic development and regeneration; environment and climate change; health, wellbeing and public sector reform and public safety. The Bill is not yet an Act of Parliament and therefore further detail on these competencies will be set out in Regulations made under the Act.
38. The Cabinet has the authority to formulate the council's overall policy objectives and priorities, which permits it to make this decision.
39. The English Devolution White Paper sets out the Government's intention that where the geographies of new Mayoral Strategic Authorities align with Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authorities, Mayors will, by default, be responsible for those services. Where those boundaries do not currently align Government has said that it will look to align public sector boundaries to strategic authority boundaries.
40. Through the English Devolution and Communities Empowerment Bill, the Government will introduce a new bespoke duty for Strategic Authorities in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. Strategic Authorities will support partners in driving public service reform and the new devolution framework will set clearer expectations for Mayors' roles in local health systems and in improving population health.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Anita.Bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

41. There are no immediate implications arising from submitting the EOI. Should the Cabinet make a later decision to proceed with devolution the staffing implications will be considered in full at that time. [OBJ]

Equality & Inclusion Implications

42. There are no immediate equalities implications arising from this report. However, the purpose of forming an MSA is to bring an all-inclusive growth strategy to the Thames Valley Region. A strategy that ensures no one is left behind in the ambition to bring economic growth.
43. The expected benefits of devolution are to drive growth, enabling local leaders place more focus on inequality and living standards. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be developed against the different elements of devolution, as proposals progress.

Sustainability Implications

44. There are no immediate sustainability implications arising from these decisions. Government has indicated it will give strategic authorities a meaningful role in planning for our future energy system, establishing heat network zoning in England and leading on local nature recovery. The detail of these various policies are to follow as the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill proceeds through Parliament.

Risk Management

45. Risks are considered in the report.

Consultations

46. The EOI was developed collaboratively, with input from local authority Leaders and Chief Executives.
47. The EOI is a strategic step to initiate formal discussions with Government, with public and stakeholder engagement planned should the Government accept the Council onto the devolution programme.
48. Devolution is a collaborative process which will require continuous engagement and collaboration between local authorities and with residents, public sector institutions including the NHS, Police and Fire Authorities, businesses, and further and high education providers and other key local organisations and businesses.
49. It is also vital that residents are involved at the earliest opportunity to inform and shape the process. It will not be possible to carry out resident engagement prior to submitting an EOI but it is expected that resident engagement would begin after Government agrees to further discussions.

Appendix 1: Expression of Interest (EOI)

Background papers: [English Devolution White Paper](#)
[English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#)

Contact Officer: Martin Reeves Chief Executive Officer
Kim Sawyer Programme Director Devolution

December 2025

This page is intentionally left blank

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.

COUNCIL 9 December 2025

GENDER AND ETHNICITY PAY GAP REPORTS FOR 2024/25

Report by the Director of HR and Cultural Change

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Council is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Note Oxfordshire County Council's statutory Gender Pay Gap report of 2025 and approve it for onward submission to the Gender Pay Gap Service by 31 March 2026.
 - b) Note the Council's voluntary Ethnicity Pay Gap report of 2025.
 - c) Agree to the publishing of both reports on the Council's website by 31 March 2026.

Executive Summary

2. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 stipulate that all businesses, public sector and third sector organisations with over 250 employees must publicly report on average pay differences between their male and female employees.
3. Unlike the gender pay gap, the Council is not legally required to publish its ethnicity pay gap. However, positive steps have been taken to measure and be transparent about the Council's performance in this area.
4. The figures are taken at a date of 31 March each year, this year's figures are from 31 March 2025. The figures set out the mean and median pay gaps. The mean is the average pay gap. The median is the middle point of a range of numbers arranged in order. If there is an even number in the range, the median is the mean (average) of the 2 middle numbers.
5. As at 31 March 2025 the Council's mean gender pay gap was 1.89%. This represents a reduction in the gap since 2024, when it was reported as 2.95%.
6. As at 31 March 2025 the Council's mean ethnicity pay gap was 2.11%. This also represents a reduction in the gap from 2.59% in March 2024.

Context

7. The gender pay gap is the difference between the average pay of men and women in an organisation. The Council is required to work out the:
 - mean (average) and median gender pay gap for hourly pay and bonus pay
 - percentage of men and women in each hourly pay quarter
 - percentage of men and women receiving bonus pay
8. Any employer with 250 or more employees on a specific date each year must report their gender pay gap data.

Positive and Negative Figures

9. A positive percentage shows that women have lower pay or bonuses than men in the Council.
10. A negative percentage shows that men have lower pay or bonuses than women in the Council.
11. A zero percentage shows that there is equal pay or bonuses between men and women within the Council.

Gender Pay Gap

12. At 31st March 2025, the Council's mean gender pay gap was 1.89% (39p per hour). This is a reduction from 2024, when the mean gender pay gap was recorded as 2.95% (59p per hour). This indicates the gender pay gap is closing.
13. At 31st March 2025, the Council's median gender pay gap was 0% (0p per hour). This is unchanged from 2024, when the median gender pay gap was also recorded as 0% (0p per hour). This demonstrates there is equal pay between both males and females.
14. The Council's workforce was 65.52% female and 34.48% male on 31st March 2025.
15. In comparison to other authorities at the time of reporting data from 2024, the Council's mean gender pay gap was in the lower quartile of responses provided. The Council will continue to benchmark against other councils and compare initiatives that could potentially have an impact on further reducing the gender pay gap.

Table 1: Local Authority Comparison of Gender Pay Gap 2024

Authority	Gender Pay Gap	Median
Buckinghamshire Council	3.9%	0.8%
Hampshire County Council	12.8%	13.4%
Oxfordshire County Council	2.95%	0%
Warwickshire County Council	0.4%	2.5%

Ethnicity Pay Gap

16. The Ethnicity Pay Gap is calculated in the same way as Gender Pay Gap, however this is not a statutory requirement currently.
17. As at 31st March 2025, the percentage difference in mean hourly rate between white employees and employees who identify as Black, Asian, or of minority ethnicity background is 2.11% (43p per hour). This represents a decrease from 2.59% in March 2024 (59p per hour), which is an improvement in reduction of the ethnicity pay gap.
18. As at 31st March 2025, the percentage difference in median hourly rate between white employees and employees who identify as Black, Asian, or of minority ethnicity background is 0% (0p per hour) and has remained at this level for the previous two reporting periods. This is a positive indication of equal pay between employees of different ethnic minorities.
19. As it is not currently a statutory obligation to report on the ethnicity pay gap, comparison data is not readily available. South East Employers have been contacted as our regional employer to determine if any comparison data is available from other authorities in order to consider the Councils position in this area.

Forward Look

20. The Council wants to ensure that the progress with pay gap reporting is accessible and understood as widely as possible and will consider how this reporting can be achieved by the use of plain English and visual examples within the report that is published.
21. As the Employment Rights Bill moves through Parliament to become law, the Council will monitor the impact on pay gap reporting and incorporate further additions, such as the Disability Pay Gap.

Financial Implications

22. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

Comments checked by:

Legal Implications

23. The Equality Act 2010 prohibits both direct and indirect sex discrimination at work and requires equal pay for equal work between the genders.
24. The Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 ("the Regulations") imposes a duty on all employers with 250 or more employees to report on the gender pay gap annually. The reporting deadline for public sector employers is 31 March. The aim of the Regulations is to identify and reduce disparities in earnings between the genders.
25. As set out in this report, the Council is not required by legislation to report on any ethnicity pay gaps but the Council chooses to do so as part of its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, it's strategic priority to be an employer of choice and to aid transparency.

Comments checked by:

Jay Akbar - Head of Legal & Governance Services
Jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

26. The Our People and Culture Strategy has been designed with the Council's strategic priority of being an employer of choice in mind which will contribute to closing the gender and ethnicity pay gaps.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

27. The Council's 'Including Everyone' Framework outlines the commitment to equalities, diversity and inclusion - across communities, service delivery and the workforce. The Council is working hard to ensure the working culture is inclusive and employee demographics reflect the diversity of the communities served, as well as ensuring that senior leaders and managers lead the way in making sure everyone feels confident to be themselves at work. The Council has partnered with Inclusive Employers, the UK's leading workplace inclusion community, to promote inclusion and best practice, as well as put in place a Reciprocal Mentoring scheme to pair senior leaders with aspiring leaders from underrepresented groups. In addition, a specific EDI HR Consultant is being recruited into the HR and Cultural Change team to embed good EDI practice into people initiatives in accordance with and underpinning the 'Our People and Culture Strategy'.

28. Flexible, agile working, and family friendly policies will also assist the Council to attract and retain employees in a competitive labour market and in a geographical area with low unemployment.
29. Alongside these initiatives, the Women's network and REACH network are two of the colleague inclusion networks, which provide colleagues with the opportunity to get to know others across the organisation and put forward ideas for improvement and to overcome any barriers they may find in progressing.

Cherie Cuthbertson
Director of HR and Cultural Change

Annexes: Annex 1 – Gender Pay Gap Report
 Annex 2 – Ethnicity Pay Gap Report

Contact Officer: Leah Jones, Interim Strategic Pay and Reward and
 Employee Relations Manager

November 2025

This page is intentionally left blank



Gender Pay Gap Report 2025

Background

1. The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 stipulate that all businesses, public sector and third sector organisations with over 250 employees must publicly report on average pay differences between their male and female employees. The Regulations require employers to publish their:
 - Mean gender pay gap in hourly pay
 - Median gender pay gap in hourly pay
 - Mean bonus gender pay gap
 - Median bonus gender pay gap
 - Proportion of males and females receiving a bonus payment, and
 - Proportion of males and females in each pay quartile.
2. As a public sector body, we are required to publish this pay gap information within 12 months, taking the “snapshot date” of 31 March 2025.
3. Our calculations follow the legislative requirements as set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties & Public Authorities) Regulations 2017. All staff who were deemed to be relevant employees at 31 March 2025 are included.
4. This information will be published on the Oxfordshire County Council website for a minimum of 3 years and published on the government website (www.gov.uk) by 31 March 2026.

Equal pay and gender pay gap

5. The purpose of gender pay gap reporting is to achieve greater gender equality in terms of pay across the UK and increase pay transparency. This differs from equal pay which deals with differences between men and women who carry out the same roles.

Details within this report

6. Using a snapshot of employees' pay as at 31 March 2025, only 3 of the 6 calculations detailed above were made due to no bonus payments being paid at Oxfordshire County Council. The 3 calculations are as follows:
 1. Mean gender pay gap
 2. Median gender pay gap
 3. The proportion of men and women divided into four quartile pay bands

Information required for publication

Relevant employee

7. An employee who was on full pay (not reduced to parental leave pay or sick pay) at the point of the data snapshot as at 31 March 2025.

Mean gender pay gap

8. The mean is defined as the average of the figures and is calculated by adding up all the figures and dividing by the number there are.

Median gender pay gap

9. The median is defined as the salary that lies at the midpoint and is calculated by ordering all salaries from highest to lowest and the median is the central figure.

Quartile pay bands

10. The quartile information is calculated by listing all salaries from highest to lowest and then splitting that information into four equal quarters to determine the percentage of male/female employees in each quartile.

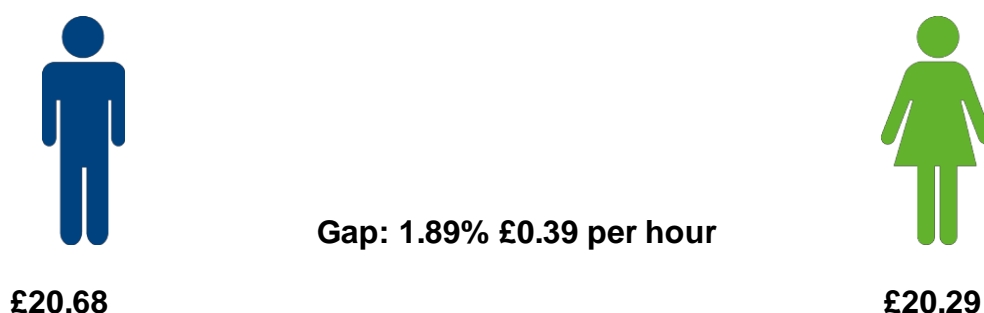
Workforce profile

11. On 31 March 2025, Oxfordshire County Council employed 5,284 relevant employees of which 34.48% (1822 employees) were men and 65.52% (3462 employees) were women. Relevant employees are all employees employed on your snapshot date, who have a contract of employment – including employees who are part-time, job-sharing, and on leave.



Gender pay gap as at 31 March 2025

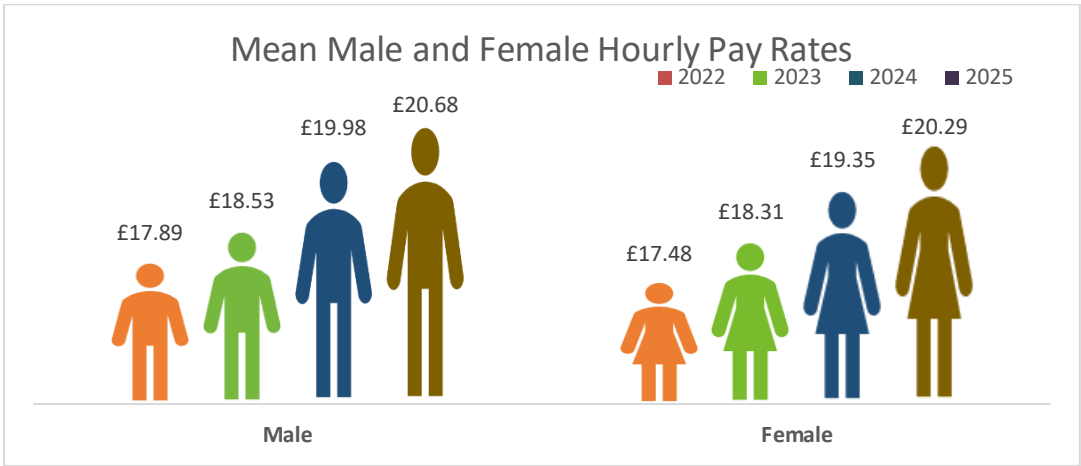
Mean: percentage difference and average hourly rate of pay



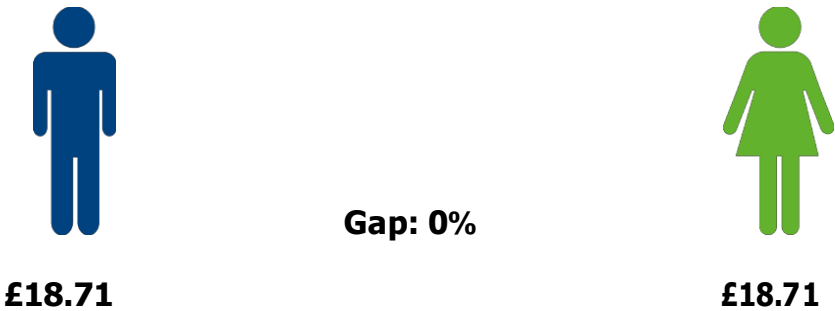
12. The mean difference recorded at Oxfordshire County Council has decreased from 2.95% in March 2024 (£0.59 per hour) and is considerably less than the national mean pay gap which was reported at 13.1% in 2024. (*Gender pay gap in the UK: 2024: Office of National Statistics*).

13. As at 31 March 2025 the mean hourly rate for men was £20.68 per hour and for women it was £20.29 per hour. This means men earned an average of £0.39 per hour more than women, which equates to a mean difference of 1.89%. The figures for 2022,

2023, 2024 and 2025 are as follows, showing a slightly steeper increase for females of £2.81 per hour over four years than the increase for males of £2.79 per hour.



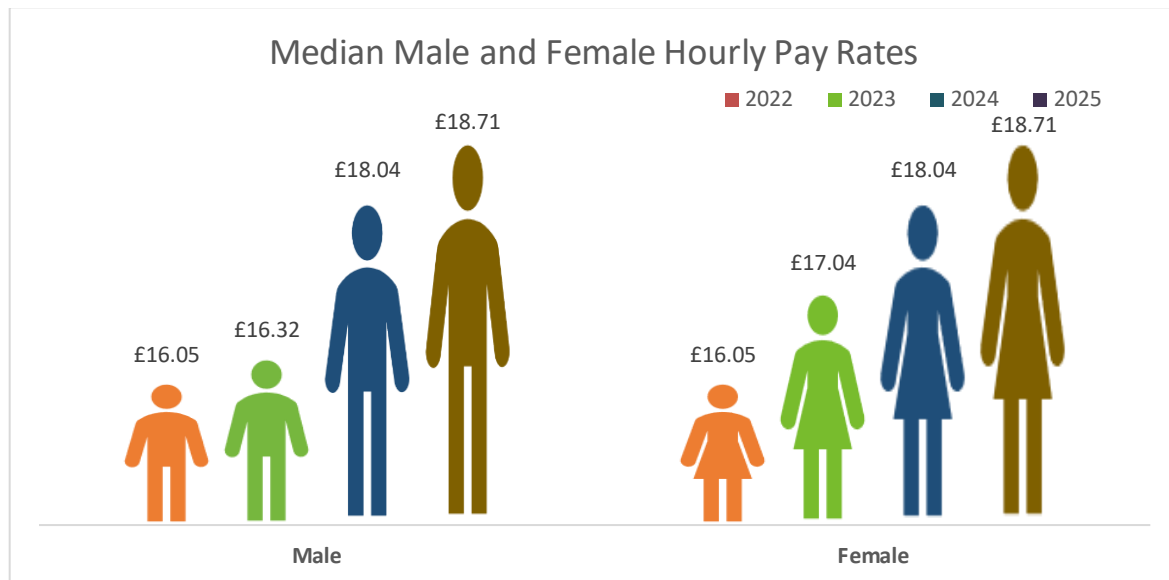
Median percentage difference and hourly rate of pay



14. As at 31 March 2025 the median hourly rate of pay for men (£18.71) was the same as for women. This gives Oxfordshire County Council a median gender pay gap of 0%, which is substantially less than the national public sector median pay gap which is 13.1% (*Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, Office for National Statistics*), demonstrating our commitment to closing the gap.

15. This shows a continuation from 2024, where the median gender pay gap was also 0%.

16. The figures for 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 are as follows, showing an equal increase for both male and females of £2.66 per hour over four years.

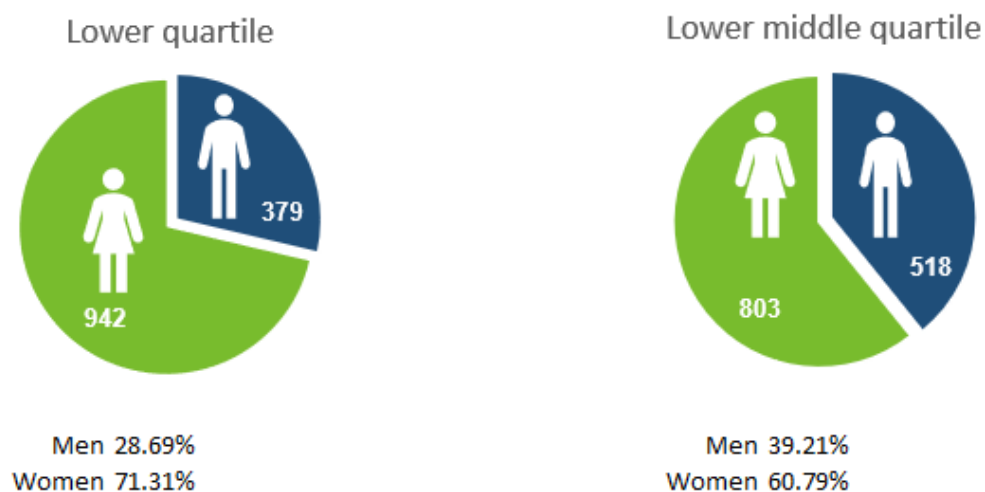


Proportion of men and women receiving bonuses

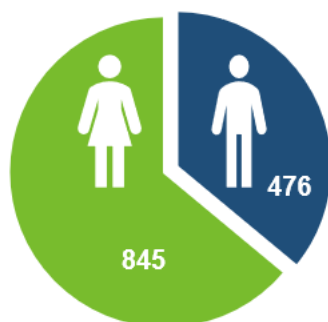
16. Oxfordshire County Council does not operate any performance-related pay or bonus schemes and therefore has no bonus gender pay gap.

Pay quartiles

17. Oxfordshire County Council employed relevant employees ¹ as of 31 March 2025 which equates to 1,321 employees per pay quartile. The gender split per quartile as at 31 March 2025 is detailed below and serves as a useful benchmark to determine progression through the pay scales.

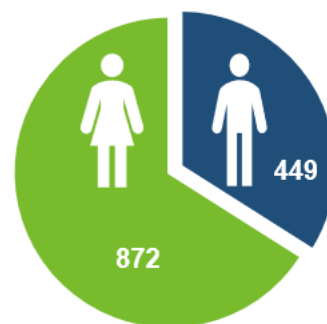


Upper middle quartile



Men 36.03%
Women 63.97%

Upper quartile



Men 33.99%
Women 66.01%

18. The hourly rates that represent each quartile are as follows:

- Lower - relates to the hourly rates of £13.6 - £17.10
- Lower middle - relates to the hourly rates of £17.10
- Upper middle - relates to the hourly rates of £20.90 - £29.80
- - £20.90
- Upper - relates to the hourly rates of £29.80 and above

19. There are slightly more females in the lower and lower middle quartiles, and slightly fewer in the upper and upper middle quartiles compared to 2024.

20. The lower quartile has seen a 0.89% decrease of females since 2024, with 71.3% of the lower quartile being female – this is not reflective of the total workforce where 65.5% of the total workforce are female.

21. Since 2024, the percentage of females in the lower middle quartile has increased by 3.29%, while the percentage of males in the top two quartiles has remained unchanged.

22. In the lower quartile the roles occupied are mainly administration, support worker roles in adult and children's social care, passenger assistants and customer service. For some of these functions there has previously been no obvious career progression route to higher earnings levels. However, through the ongoing organisation redesign program, which saw the introduction of career families, the council continues to seek and promote opportunities for employees to develop and progress. The council also provides opportunities for employees to undertake apprenticeships and functional skills Maths and English whilst in employment with the Council to support their ongoing career development.

23. At the senior management level, 54.5% of the Extended Leadership Team

which includes directors, deputy directors, and assistant directors are women, while 45.5% are men. Although this represents a relatively balanced distribution, it does not correspond to the composition of the total workforce, of which two thirds are women. Positively, there has been a 9% increase in female leadership compared to 2024.

Commitment

24. We are committed to the principles of equality, diversity, fairness and inclusion and our approach to people management should not put any group at a disadvantage. Regardless of identity or background, everyone deserves to be able to develop their skills and talents to meet their full potential, work in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, be fairly rewarded and recognised for the work they do and have the opportunity to have their say on matters that affect them. We are also committed to achieving a diverse workforce that fully reflects our community.
25. We will continue to explore our inclusion initiatives, particularly where there are any barriers for women to progress into higher paid roles, or roles where they are under-represented.
26. Flexible, agile working and family-friendly policies will assist Oxfordshire County Council to attract and retain staff in a competitive job market and in a geographical area with low unemployment.

August 2025

This page is intentionally left blank



Ethnicity Pay Gap 2025

Introduction

At Oxfordshire County Council we are committed to increasing the diversity of our workforce and addressing any barriers to progression for colleagues from an ethnic minority background.

Calculating the ethnicity pay gap

Unlike the gender pay gap, we are not yet legally required to publish our ethnicity pay gap, however, we have taken the important step to be transparent about our ethnicity pay gap and have calculated it using the same methodology set out in the Government regulations for calculating our gender pay gap, using the same snapshot date of 31st March 2025.

The details included in this report are:

- Mean ethnicity pay gap in hourly pay;
- Median ethnicity pay gap in hourly pay;
- Proportion of White, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority employees in each pay quartile.

We do not pay bonuses, so the mean and median bonus pay gap have not been included.

Median and Mean

We look at both the mean and the median measures. The mean difference is the difference in average hourly pay, adding all pay rates together and dividing by the total number of people. The median difference is the difference in hourly pay between the middle paid White employee and the middle-paid Black, Asian and Ethnic minority employees (the person at the mid-point if you were to line all employees up). The median is the most representative measure of an 'average' employee as it negates high and low outliers in a data set that would normally skew the mean.

Relevant Employees

A relevant employee is an employee that received full pay (not reduced to parental leave pay or sick pay, for example) as at the snapshot of data on 31 March 2024.

Workforce profile

At the time of reporting (31 March 2025), Oxfordshire County Council had 5284 relevant employees; of which 92.35% had told us their ethnicity. This is a significant proportion of our employees, and we recognise that this percentage enables us to develop a good insight into our employee population. There is still some work to do to close the gap, but this is a very good response rate for an organisation of our size. The remaining 7.65% of relevant employees have either chosen not to tell us their ethnicity or we do not have data about them. This is an improvement from our first reporting period of 2020 at which point 8.5% of relevant employees did not disclose their ethnicity – this group has not been included in this report. We continue to encourage our employees to disclose this information to support ongoing EDI initiatives.

Ethnicity Data

White (British, Irish, Eastern European, Other)	Black (Caribbean, African, Mixed, Other)	Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Mixed, Other)	Other Ethnicity
88.07%	4.26%	4.27%	3.4%

In total, the percentage of employees reporting as Black, Asian or Ethnic Minority is 11.93%. This represents an increase from 10.37% in 2024.

The number of relevant employees reporting as Black, Asian, Mixed or ethnic minority has increased by 31.8% since 31 March 2020 (first reporting period), from 397 to 582.

Ethnicity pay gap as at 31 March 2025

Mean hourly pay

The mean pay gap between employees from White ethnic backgrounds and Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds saw a reduction in March 2025, when the percentage difference in mean hourly rate was 2.11% (43p per hour). This is an improvement from 2024.

In March 2024 the difference was 2.59%. This demonstrates our efforts to close this gap have been effective, and we continue to work towards further reducing this gap.



Median hourly pay

The percentage difference in median hourly rate saw an increase in March 2025 when it was 2.51% (47p per hour). This figure was 0% in March 2024.

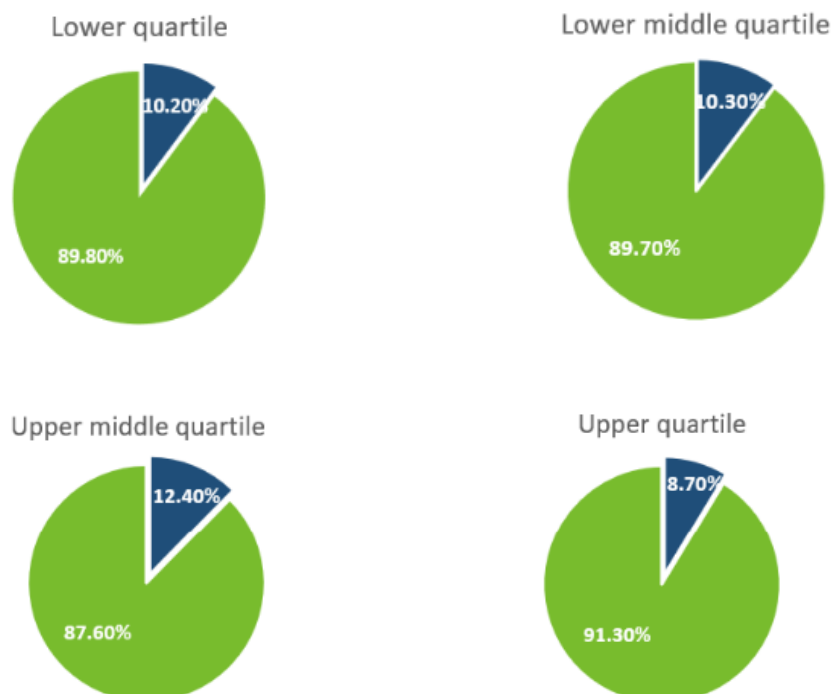
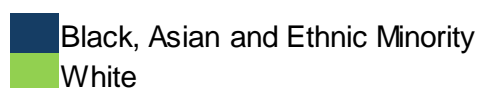
The percentage difference has decreased since the first reporting period in March 2020 where the difference was 5.5% (82p per hour). This demonstrates the gap is reducing overall.



Pay quartiles

The quartile information is calculated by listing all salaries from highest to lowest and then splitting that information into four equal quarters to determine the percentage of White and Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees in each quartile.

Proportion of White and Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees by pay quartile:



The hourly rates that represent each quartile are as follows:

- Lower - relates to the hourly rates up to £14.16
- Lower middle - relates to the hourly rates of £14.16 – 18.04
- Upper middle - relates to the hourly rates of £18.04 - £22.49
- Upper - relates to the hourly rates of £22.49 and above

The highest proportion of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority employees continues to be seen within the upper middle pay quartile, where the percentage increased from 12.4% in March 2024 to 14.80% in March 2025. Detailed analysis suggests that this trend relates to the concentration of Social Worker, Occupational Therapist and Children's and Early Help Practitioner roles in this quartile, both of which employ a significant proportion of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority staff.

Within the upper quartile, the proportion of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority employees rose from 8.7% in March 2024 to 10.39% in March 2025. Likewise, in the lower quartile, there was an increase from 10.2% in March 2024 to 10.57% in March 2025. This is in part linked to the Tier 1-4 organisation redesign programme and alignment of roles and pay.

The proportion of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority employees in the lower middle quartile has shown consistent growth, rising from 8.7% in March 2022 to 9.5% in March 2023, 10.7% in March 2024, and reaching 12.49% in March 2025. It is

noteworthy that adults' and children's social care positions at this level continue to be filled by a higher proportion of Black, Asian, and ethnic minority staff.

Commitment

We are committed to the principles of equality, diversity, fairness and inclusion and our approach to people management should not put any group at a disadvantage. Regardless of identity or background, everyone deserves to be able to develop their skills and talents to meet their full potential, work in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment, be fairly rewarded and recognised for the work they do and have the opportunity to have their say on matters that affect them. We are also committed to achieving a diverse workforce that fully reflects our community.

Our work to improve our approach to equalities, inclusion and diversity is underway. Some of the initial actions taken so far in 2024 and 2025 include:

- Continue to deliver unconscious bias training to managers
- Signed up to RACE Equality Code
- Signed up to Anti-Racism Charter
- Improved EDI steering group
- Recruiting to EDI specific positions
- Extended and expanded Reciprocal Mentoring scheme

We are committed to working with all employees to ensure effective career conversations with managers are consistently taking place as well as recognition of the work they do for staff networks outside of their day jobs through our managing for performance framework (12:3:2). Skills obtained through network activities should be recognised with opportunities to use these skills in other aspects of their role.

The council is also focusing on how to develop career pathways, in particular enabling progression from roles in the lower quartile to the lower middle quartile as well as how to increase representation of Black, Asian and ethnic minority employees in senior management roles.

August 2025

This page is intentionally left blank

COUNCIL – 9 DECEMBER 2025

TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-TERM REVIEW 2025/26

Report by the Executive Director of Resources & Section 151 Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. Council is RECOMMENDED to note the council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2025/26.

Executive Summary

2. Treasury management is defined as: "The management of the organisation's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including its banking, money market and capital market transactions, the effective control of the risks associated with those activities, and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."
3. 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. This report is the second for the 2025/26 financial year and sets out the position at 30 September 2025.
4. Throughout this report, the performance for the first half of the year to September 2025 is measured against the budget agreed by Council in February 2025.
5. As at 30 September 2025, the council's outstanding debt totalled £270m and the average rate of interest paid on long-term debt during the 6 months was 4.41%. No new external borrowing was raised during the first half of the year, whilst £2m of maturing Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), was repaid. The council's forecast debt financing position for 2025/26 is shown in Annex 1.
6. The [Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26](#) agreed in February 2025 assumed an average base rate of 4.00%.
7. The average daily balance of temporary surplus cash invested in-house was expected to be £303m in 2025/26, with an average in-house return on new and existing deposits of 3.25%.

8. During the six months to 30 September 2025 the council achieved an average in-house return of 4.60% on average cash balances of £447.966m, producing gross interest receivable of £9.896m. In relation to external funds, the return for the six months was £2.004m, bringing total investment income to £11.900m. This compares to budgeted investment income of £6.771m, giving a net overachievement of £5.129m.
9. At 30 September 2025, the council's investment portfolio totalled £490.582m. This comprised £356.500m of fixed term deposits, £32.972m at short term notice in money market funds and £101.110m in pooled funds with a variable net asset value. Annex 4 provides an analysis of the investment portfolio at 30 September 2025.
10. The report was considered by Cabinet on 18 November and Audit & Governance Committee on 26 November. Cabinet and Audit & Governance Committee recommend Council to note the report.

Treasury Management Activity

Debt Financing & Maturing Debt

11. The strategy for long term borrowing agreed in February 2025 included the option to fund new or replacement borrowing up to the value of £300m through internal borrowing. The aim was to reduce the council's exposure to credit risk and reduce the long-term cost of carry (difference between borrowing costs and investment returns).
12. The council is able to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) or through the money markets. Because inflation has been higher than the Bank of England target bond yields, and therefore PWLB rates, remain high. Average CPI inflation for the first half of the year was 3.65%, which was significantly above the target of 2%. The expectation is that as inflation falls, PWLB rates should reduce over the medium term. Given the forecast for borrowing rates, the strategy for 2025/26 assumes no new external borrowing during the year, with any increase in the capital financing requirement met through internal borrowing. The exception to this being the council actively considering raising further funding through a second community municipal investment.
13. As at 30 September 2025, the authority had 41 PWLB loans totalling £239.383m, five LOBO loans totalling £25m and two money market loans totalling £5.5m. The average rate of interest paid on PWLB debt was 4.47% and the average cost of LOBO debt for the first half of 2025/26 was 3.84%. The cost of debt on the money market loan was 3.99%. The combined weighted average for interest paid on long-term debt was 4.41%. The council's debt portfolio as at 30 September 2025 is shown in Annex 1.
14. The council repaid £2m of maturing PWLB loans in the first half of the year. The weighted average interest rate payable on the matured loans was 4.25%. No

LOBO¹ loans have been called and repaid in 2025/26. The forecast outturn for interest payable in 2025/26 is £11.887m.

Investment Strategy

15. The council holds deposits and invested funds representing income received in advance of expenditure plus balances and reserves. The guidance on Local Government Investments in England gives priority to security and liquidity and the council's aim is to achieve a yield commensurate with these principles. The council continued to adopt a cautious approach to lending to financial institutions and continuously monitored credit quality information relating to counterparties.
16. During the first half of the financial year term fixed deposits have been placed with other local authorities as per the approved lending list, whilst Money Market Funds have been utilised for short-term liquidity. Inter local authority lending remains an attractive market to deposit funds from both a security and return view point.
17. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2025/26 included the use of external fund managers and pooled funds to diversify the investment portfolio through the use of different investment instruments, investment in different markets, and exposure to a range of counterparties. It is expected that these funds should outperform the council's in-house investment performance over a rolling three-year period. The strategy permitted up to 50% of the total portfolio to be invested with external fund managers and pooled funds (excluding Money Market Funds). The performance of the pooled funds will continue to be monitored by the Treasury Management Strategy Team (TMST) throughout the year against respective benchmarks and the in-house portfolio.
18. At the start of the year the UK Bank Rate was 4.50% which was in line with the forecast. The Bank of England cut rates by 0.25% in May 2025 to 4.25%, and again in August to 4.00%. The market is forecasting that the base rate will continue to reduce to between 3.75% and 3.50% by the end of 2025/26.

The Council's Lending List

19. In-house cash balances are deposited with institutions that meet the council's approved credit rating criteria. The approved lending list, which sets out those institutions, is updated to reflect changes in bank and building society credit ratings. Changes are reported to Cabinet as part of the Business Management & Monitoring Report. The approved lending list may also be further restricted by officers, in response to changing conditions and perceived risk. There were no changes to the lending list during the first quarter of 2025/26.

¹ LOBO (Lender's Option/Borrower's Option) Loans are long-term loans which include a re-pricing option for the bank at predetermined intervals.

Investment Performance

20. Temporary surplus cash balances include: developer contributions; council reserves and balances; and various other funds to which the council pays interest at each financial year end. The budgeted annual return on these in-house balances for 2025/26 was 3.25% and assumed an average annual in-house cash balance of £303.534m.
21. The actual average daily balance of temporary surplus cash invested in-house was £447.966m for the first half of 2025/26 and the average in-house return was 4.60%, producing gross interest receivable of £9.896m. Gross distributions from pooled funds totalling £2.004m were also realised in the quarter, bringing total investment income to £11.900m. This compares to budgeted investment income of £6.771m, giving a net overachievement of £5.129m. This over achievement is a combination of higher than forecast balances, base rate forecasts remaining higher than previous forecasts, and a decoupling of the local to local lending market from the remainder of the money market. The local to local lending market is more aligned to the gilt market, which remains elevated as a result of persistently high inflation. As set out in Business Management & Monitoring Report to Cabinet in October 2025, £1.5m of the forecast additional income has been included in the forecast revenue position for 2025/26 and is offsetting service overspends. The use of the remainder will be considered later in the financial year or as part of the budget process for 2026/27.
22. Cash balances for the year are forecast to be lower than they otherwise would be as a result of negative Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) balances relating to High Needs. As set out in the Business Management & Monitoring Report to Cabinet in October 2025, the negative DSG balance is forecast to be £153.4m as at 31 March 2026. Because this expenditure is currently unfunded it is suppressing the amount of cash balances held by the council. This would have an estimated opportunity cost of £6.14m in unearned interest during 2025/26.
23. The council operates a number of instant access call accounts and money market funds to deposit short-term cash surpluses. During the first quarter of 2025/26 the average balance held on instant access was £85.903m, at an average rate of 4.28%.
24. At 30 September 2025 the total value of pooled fund investments was £101.110m. This has increased from the reported value of £97.919m at 31 March 2025.
25. At 30 September 2025, the council's investment portfolio totalled £490.582m. This comprised £356.500m of fixed term deposits, £32.972 at short term notice in money market funds and £101.110m in pooled funds with a variable net asset value. Annex 4 provides an analysis of the investment portfolio at 30 September 2025.

26. The council's Treasury Management Strategy Team regularly monitors the risk profile of the council's investment portfolio. An analysis of the credit and maturity position of the portfolio at 30 September 2025 is included at Annex 4.

Prudential Indicators for Treasury Management

27. During the first two quarters of the year, the council operated within the treasury limits and Prudential Indicators set out in the council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26. The position for the Prudential Indicators as at 30 September 2025 is shown in Annex 3.

Financial Implications

28. This report is mostly concerned with finance and the implications are set out in the main body of the report. The impact of additional interest on cash balances and income from investments is reflected in the forecast position set out in the Business Management & Monitoring Reports to Cabinet. The use of further funding to support the council's capital programme will be considered through the budget process for 2026/27.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, kathy.wilcox@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

29. The report meets the requirements of both the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. The Council is required to comply with both Codes through Regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003. There are no other legal implications.

Comments checked by:

Jay Akbar, Head of Legal and Governance Services,
jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

30. There are no staffing implications arising from the updates set out in this report

Equality & Inclusion Implications

31. There are no equality or inclusion implications arising from the report.

Sustainability Implications

32. This report is not expected to have any negative impact with regards to the Council's zero carbon emissions commitment by 2030.

Risk Management

33. The purpose of treasury management is the management of the council's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including its banking, money market and capital market transactions; the effective control of the risks associated with those activities; and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks". The Prudential Code
34. Prudential indicators and credit criteria are agreed by Council each year as part of the Treasury Management Strategy.
35. The credit quality of institutions, changes in the interest rate forecast, cash flow, and prudential indicators are monitored throughout the year and reported monthly to the TMST and quarterly to the council's Audit & Governance Committee, Cabinet and Council.

LORNA BAXTER

Executive Director of Resources & Section 151 Officer

Annex: Annex 1 – Oxfordshire County Council Debt Financing
2024/25

Annex 2 – Long Term Debt Maturing 2025/26

Annex 3 – Prudential Indicator Monitoring to 30 September 2025

Annex 4 – Oxfordshire County Council Investment Portfolio at 30 September 2025

Background papers: Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26

Contact Officer: Tim Chapple, Treasury Manager, 07917 262935,
tim.chapple@oxfordshire.gov.uk

November 2025

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DEBT FINANCING 2025/26

<u>Debt Profile</u>		£m
1. PWLB	49%	241.38
2. Other Long Term Loans	6%	<u>30.50</u>
3. Sub-total External Debt		271.88
4. Internal Balances	45%	<u>218.33</u>
5. Actual Debt at 31 March 2025	100%	490.21
6. Prudential Borrowing		85.17
7. Borrowing in Advance		0.00
8. Minimum Revenue Provision		<u>-16.38</u>
9. Forecast Debt at 31 March 2026		559.00
<u>Maturing Debt</u>		
10. PWLB loans maturing during the year		-2.00
11. PWLB/LOBO Loans repaid prematurely		<u>0.00</u>
12. Total Maturing Debt		-2.00
<u>New External Borrowing</u>		
13. PWLB Normal		0.00
14. PWLB loans raised in the course of debt restructuring		0.00
15. Money Market loans		<u>0.00</u>
16. Total New External Borrowing		0.00
<u>Debt Profile Year End</u>		
17. PWLB	43%	239.38
18. Money Market loans (incl £25m LOBOs)	5%	<u>30.50</u>
19. Forecast Sub-total External Debt		269.88
20. Forecast Internal Balances	52%	<u>289.12</u>
21. Forecast Debt at 31 March 2026	100%	559.00

Line Explanation

- 1 – 5 This is a breakdown of the Council's debt at the beginning of the financial year (1 April 2025). The PWLB is a government agency operating within the Debt Management Office. LOBO (Lender's Option/ Borrower's Option) loans are long-term loans, with a maturity of up to 60 years, which includes a re-pricing option for the bank at predetermined time intervals. Internal balances include provisions, reserves, revenue balances, capital receipts unapplied, and excess of creditors over debtors.
- 6 'Prudential Borrowing' is borrowing taken by the authority whereby the associated borrowing costs are met by savings in the revenue budget.
- 7 'Borrowing in Advance' is the amount the Council borrowed in advance to fund future capital finance costs.
- 8 The amount of debt to be repaid from revenue. The sum to be repaid annually is laid down in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which stipulates that the repayments must equate to at least 4% of the debt outstanding at 1 April each year.
- 9 The Council's forecast total debt by the end of the financial year, after taking into account new borrowing, debt repayment and movement in funding by internal balances.
- 10 The Council's normal maturing PWLB debt.
- 11 PWLB/LOBO debt repaid early during the year.
- 12 Total debt repayable during the year.
- 13 The normal PWLB borrowing undertaken by the Council during 2025/26.
- 14 New PWLB loans to replace debt repaid early.
- 15 The Money Market borrowing undertaken by the Council during 2025/26
- 16 The total external borrowing undertaken.
- 18-22 The Council's forecast debt profile at the end of the year.

Long-Term Debt Maturing 2025/26**Public Works Loan Board: Loans maturing during 2025/26**

Date	Amount £m	Rate %
30/04/2025	2.000	4.250%
Total	2.000	

LOBO Loans called & repaid during 2025/26

Date	Amount £m	Rate %
Total		

Prudential Indicators Monitoring at 30 September 2025

The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Authority to have regard to CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code) when determining how much money it can afford to borrow. To demonstrate that the Authority has fulfilled the requirements of the Prudential Code the following indicators must be set and monitored each year.

Authorised and Operational Limit for External Debt

Actual debt levels are monitored against the Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit for External Debt below. The Operational Boundary is based on the Authority's estimate of most likely, i.e. prudent, but not worst case scenario for external debt. The council confirms that the Operational Boundary has not been breached during the third quarter of 2025/26.

The Authorised Limit is the affordable borrowing limit determined in compliance with the Local Government Act 2003. It is the maximum debt that the Authority can legally owe. The authorised limit provides headroom over and above the operational boundary for unusual cash movements. The Authorised Limit was not breached in the in the third quarter of 2025/26 and is not expected to be breached by year end.

Authorised limit for External Debt	£610,000,000
Operational Limit for External Debt	£595,000,000
Capital Financing Requirement for year	£559,201,000

	Actual 31/03/2025	Forecast 31/03/2026
Borrowing	£271,882,618	£269,882,618
Other Long-Term Liabilities	£ 836,000	£ 836,000
Total	£272,718,618	£270,718,618

Interest Rate Exposures

These indicators are set to control the Authority's exposure to interest rate risk. The upper limits on fixed and variable rate interest exposures. Fixed rate investments are borrowings are those where the rate of interest is fixed for the whole financial year. Instruments that mature during the financial year are classed as variable rate.

Fixed Interest Rate Exposure

Fixed Interest Net Borrowing limit	£350,000,000
Actual at 30 September 2025	-£111,617,382

Variable Interest Rate Exposure

Variable Interest Net Borrowing limit	£0
Actual at 30 September 2025	-£108,246,019

Principal Sums Invested over 365 days

Total sums invested for more than 364 days limit	£150,000,000
Actual sums invested for more than 364 days	£ 25,000,000

Maturity Structure of Borrowing

This indicator is set to control the Authority's exposure to refinancing risk. The upper and lower limits on the maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing and the actual structure at June 2025, are shown below. Time periods start on the first day of each financial year. The maturity date of borrowing is the earliest date on which the lender can demand repayment.

	Limit %	Actual %
Under 12 months	0 - 20	5.22
12 – 24 months	0 - 25	15.23
24 months – 5 years	0 - 35	11.37
5 years to 10 years	5 - 40	24.08
10 years +	25 - 95	44.09

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO 30/09/2025

Fixed term deposits held at 30/09/2025

Counterparty	Principal Deposited	Maturity Date
Surrey Heath Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	01/10/2025
Surrey Heath Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	02/10/2025
Bradford Metropolitan District Council	£5,000,000.00	06/10/2025
Surrey Heath Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	08/10/2025
West Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	14/10/2025
Aberdeen City Council	£5,000,000.00	28/10/2025
Fife Council	£5,000,000.00	30/10/2025
Wakefield Council	£5,000,000.00	30/10/2025
Kingston Upon Hull City Council	£5,000,000.00	04/11/2025
Aberdeen City Council	£5,000,000.00	06/11/2025
North East Lincolnshire Council	£5,000,000.00	21/11/2025
Worthing Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	21/11/2025
Bradford Metropolitan District Council	£5,000,000.00	21/11/2025
Conwy County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	21/11/2025
Moray Council	£5,000,000.00	24/11/2025
Fife Council	£5,000,000.00	02/12/2025
Ashford Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	08/12/2025
The Highland Council	£3,000,000.00	10/12/2025
High Peak Borough Council	£2,500,000.00	18/12/2025
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	£2,500,000.00	18/12/2025
Aberdeen City Council	£5,000,000.00	06/01/2026
Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside	£5,000,000.00	07/01/2026
Leeds City Council	£10,000,000.00	12/01/2026
Wrexham County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	14/01/2026
Aberdeen City Council	£5,000,000.00	29/01/2026
West Dunbartonshire Council	£10,000,000.00	26/02/2026
Wrexham County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	27/02/2026
London Borough of Newham Council	£5,000,000.00	11/03/2026
London Borough of Newham Council	£10,000,000.00	30/03/2026
Gravesham Borough Council	£7,500,000.00	01/04/2026
Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire	£5,000,000.00	02/04/2026
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	22/04/2026
Eastleigh Borough Council	£6,000,000.00	22/04/2026
Plymouth City Council	£5,000,000.00	24/04/2026
Eastleigh Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	08/05/2026
Surrey County Council	£10,000,000.00	08/05/2026
Darlington Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	11/05/2026
Blackpool Council	£5,000,000.00	12/05/2026

Counterparty	Principal Deposited	Maturity Date
Monmouthshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	12/05/2026
Central Bedfordshire Council	£5,000,000.00	12/05/2026
Isle of Wight Council	£5,000,000.00	18/05/2026
Central Bedfordshire Council	£5,000,000.00	20/05/2026
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	27/05/2026
Ashford Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	28/05/2026
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	28/05/2026
Cheshire East Council	£5,000,000.00	29/05/2026
London Borough of Newham Council	£5,000,000.00	01/06/2026
London Borough of Haringey Council	£5,000,000.00	01/06/2026
Manchester City Council	£5,000,000.00	02/06/2026
Cheshire East Council	£5,000,000.00	02/06/2026
Manchester City Council	£5,000,000.00	10/06/2026
South Ayrshire Council	£5,000,000.00	17/06/2026
Plymouth City Council	£5,000,000.00	17/06/2026
Isle of Wight Council	£5,000,000.00	24/06/2026
West Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	01/07/2026
Plymouth City Council	£5,000,000.00	02/07/2026
Blackpool Council	£5,000,000.00	13/07/2026
Cheshire East Council	£10,000,000.00	13/07/2026
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	30/07/2026
Derbyshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	25/08/2026
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	28/08/2026
Kingston Upon Hull City Council	£5,000,000.00	03/09/2026
Short Term Deposit Total	£331,500,000.00	
Counterparty	Principal Deposited	Maturity Date
Kirklees Council	£5,000,000.00	22/01/2027
Kirklees Council	£5,000,000.00	17/03/2027
Worcestershire County Council	£5,000,000.00	17/12/2027
Worcestershire County Council	£5,000,000.00	23/12/2027
Falkirk Council	£5,000,000.00	31/01/2028
Long Term Deposit Total	£25,000,000.00	
Total Deposits	£356,500,000.00	

Money Market Funds

Counterparty	Balance at 30/09/2025 period	Notice
Aberdeen Liquidity Fund	£50,000.00	Same day
Goldman Sachs Sterling Liquid Fund	£0.00	Same day
Deutsche Sterling Liquid Fund	£27,890.84	Same day
Federated Sterling Liquidity Funds	£7,700,000.00	Same day
Legal & General Sterling Liquidity Fund	£25,081,499.61	Same day
CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund	£5,619.88	Same day
Morgan Stanley Sterling Liquid Fund	£100,000.00	Same day
Insight GBP Liquidity Fund	£0.00	Same day
JP Morgan Sterling Liquidity Fund	£4,585.26	Same day
Total	£32,969,595.59	

Notice / Call Accounts

Counterparty period	Balance at 30/09/2025 (£)	Notice
Handlesbanken	£2,389.13	Same day
Total	£2,389.13	

Strategic Bond Funds

Fund period	Balance at 30/09/2025	Notice
Threadneedle strategic bond fund (income)	£12,645,423.58	4 days
Threadneedle Global Equity Income Fund	£18,047,910.10	4 days
Kames Diversified Income	£9,773,911.43	4 days
Ninety One Diversified Income	£9,117,011.11	4 days
M&G Strategic Corporate Bond Fund	£11,100,231.08	4 days
Schroder Income Maximiser	£12,412,962.90	4 days
CCLA Better World Cautious Fund	£4,627,979.37	4 days
Total	£77,725,429.56	

Property Funds

Fund Notice period	Balance at 30/09/2025 (£)	
CCLA Local Authorities Property Fund	£23,384,604.36	6 Monthly
Total	£23,384,604.36	

Summary of Investments as at 30/09/2025

Term Deposits	£356,500,000.00
Money Market Funds	£32,969,595.59
Notice & Call Accounts	£2,389.13
Subtotal Short Term Notice	32,971,984.70
Pooled Funds	£77,725,429.56
Property Funds	£23,384,604.36
Subtotal Pooled & Property Funds	101,110,033.92
Total Investments	£490,582,018.64

This page is intentionally left blank

Divisions: N/A

COUNTY COUNCIL – 9 DECEMBER 2025

SCHEME OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES 2026/27

Report by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is RECOMMENDED to adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances for the financial year 2026/27, and in so doing to consider the following options, either:

- 1) To adopt the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel made in November 2025 and as set out in Annex 1 to this report; OR**
- 2) To adopt any particular recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel as the Council may determine; OR**
- 3) To agree alternative values for any of the allowances, as the Council may determine; OR**
- 4) If the Council does not wish to accept the Panel's recommendations at this time, in whole or in part, or to substitute alternative amounts, to agree a status quo Scheme of Allowances for 2026/27 for any unchanged aspect; AND**
- 5) That in any event, the Council adopts an annual index for a four year period (whereby if no other changes occur to a Scheme, then the Members' Allowances may increase in relation to that index for a period of no more than four years), and that this should relate (as in previous years) to the annual pay award for local government staff. If adopted, the increase will be in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect.**

Introduction

- 1. Each year, Full Council is required to adopt a Scheme of Members' Allowances to apply from 1 April of the following year. In particular, it must set the amount of a Basic Allowance payable to all members and may make payments for Special Responsibility and Co-opted Members' Allowances. Accordingly, this report asks members to adopt a Scheme of Allowances to apply from 1 April 2026.**
- 2. Principally, Council's attention is drawn to the recommendations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel in November 2025 which are attached at Annex 1. In adopting a Scheme, the Council must have regard to the**

recommendations. However, it is the Council's choice whether to accept the Panel's recommendations in whole or in part, or not at all, or to determine other amounts. As such, options are set out in this report.

3. The Council may, for example, agree other amounts; or adopt a status quo Scheme which makes no substantive changes. In addition, Council may also choose to adopt an index, as in previous years, whereby the Basic, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-opted Members' Allowances would rise each year by reference to an index. Formerly the Council has adopted as an index the pay award for local government employees.
4. Council may also wish to note that whatever Scheme is adopted, each individual member may choose to forgo any allowance to which they are entitled, in whole or in part, on a voluntary basis.
5. The Council must make a Scheme by no later than 31 March 2026.

Making a Scheme of Members' Allowances

Option A) The Independent Remuneration Panel

Approach

6. In framing its recommendations, the Independent Remuneration Panel had regard to a range of evidence, comparative information, survey responses from councillors and interviews a cross-section of members of the council. The Panel was mindful of its role of assessing what allowances are appropriate to the roles of elected and co-opted members, having regard to their workload formally and within constituencies and with an understanding of additional responsibilities where these are performed within the Council's governance arrangements.
7. The Panel was also mindful of the political and budgetary implications surrounding the adoption of a Members' Allowances Scheme but recognised that such considerations are for the Council to determine.
8. The Panel also recognised that an individual member can choose whether or not to accept an allowance in full or in part. Rather, the Panel concentrated on providing the Council with an objective, benchmarked view on what allowances it thinks are appropriate to the roles of elected and co-opted members for Oxfordshire County Council.
9. It has also been mindful that a Members Allowances Scheme is intended to present allowances that minimise the potential for any person to be out of pocket as a result of serving their community; recognising of course that some aspect of councillor's service is necessarily voluntary. Therefore, while a Scheme cannot alone influence wider democratic representation, it should at least not be a barrier to it. The Panel has presented its recommendations with these principles in mind. However, full Council may choose to accept these recommendations in whole or in part, or not at all.

The Panel's recommendations

10. The Panel's full Report is included as Annex 1. It sets out their recommendations in full, with rationale given at each stage. The main changes are:
- That the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors increase from £14,268 to £15,420 per annum; and
 - That, in addition to the Basic Allowance, a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) be paid as follows:-

PROPOSED ALLOWANCES FROM IRP 2026/27

SRA Position	Multiplier (of basic allowance of £15,420)	New Allowance	Comments
Leader of the Council	x 3	£46,260	
Deputy Leader of the Council	x 2	£30,840	
Cabinet Member	x 1.6	£24,672	
Leader of the Opposition	x 1	£15,420	
Shadow Cabinet Member	x 0.25	£3,852	
Chair of the Council	x 0.85	£13,104	
Vice-Chair of the Council	x 0.25	£3,276	This is 0.25 of the Chair's SRA not the BA
Scrutiny Chairs	x 0.6	£9,252	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education & Young People • Health • Performance & Corporate Services • Place
Chair of Oxfordshire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Horton Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	x 0	£0	IRP suggest this is deleted
Chair of Planning & Regulation Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Audit & Governance Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of the Audit Working Group when a Co-opted Member	X 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Pension Fund Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Locality Meeting Chair	x 0.1	£1,548	

Adoption & Fostering Panel Members			£120 for each attendance; capped at £1,500 per annum
Police & Crime Panel Chair	x 0.6	£9,252	

- c. That a cap be retained, such that no individual member of the Council should be entitled to receive more than two Special Responsibility Allowances at any one time.
- d. That the Co-optees' Allowance continues to be payable to an independent co-opted member of the Audit & Governance Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chair of the Audit Working Group, equivalent to Committee/Scrutiny Committee Chair and increased to £9,252.
- e. That the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and the Co-optees' Allowance to the Chair of the Audit Working Group be amended annually in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect; however, if the above increases are agreed, the pay award should not be applied to any increased allowances in 2026/27 but from 2027/28. This will be limited to the four-year term of each council.
- f. That Child and Dependant Carer's Allowances be increased:-
 - i. Child Care: the hourly rate is equivalent to the Oxford Living Wage of £14.06 per hour capped at 120 hours per year, payable on production of receipts
 - ii. Dependant Carer: the hourly rate is twice the Oxford Living Wage i.e £28.12 per hour capped at 120 hours per year, payable on production of receipts
- g. That the Council retains, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers. Overnight accommodation to be booked by officers where possible; when alternative accommodation arrangements are to be used, this should be approved by the relevant officer.
- h. That claims made under the Council's travel and subsistence scheme be accompanied by receipts and/or any other relevant evidence of the costs incurred and that claims under the scheme be made, in writing, within two months of the relevant duty in respect of which the entitlement to the allowance arises
- i. the list of Approved Duties for the purpose of travel, subsistence and dependant care allowances continue
- j. That the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowances be rounded to the nearest pound when first set.

Option B) Alternative amounts

11. The Council may choose alternative amounts for the Basic, Special Responsibility and Co-opted Member Allowances as it may determine, other than those recommended by the Panel. For information, the current values are shown below, in paragraph 12.

Option C) Status quo scheme

12. If the Council does not wish to make any substantive changes at this time, it may adopt a status quo Scheme based on the currently adopted Scheme. For information, the current values are shown below:

CURRENT ALLOWANCES 2025/26

Basic Allowance	£14,268
Leader of the Council	£42,804
Deputy Leader of the Council	£28,536
Cabinet Member	£22,824
Leader of the Opposition	£13,824
Shadow Cabinet Member	£3,456
Chair of the Council	£11,748
Vice-Chair of the Council	£2,928
Scrutiny Chairs	£8,568
Chair of Oxfordshire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	£8,568
Chair of Horton Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	£6,435
Chair of Planning & Regulation Committee	£8,568
Chair of Audit & Governance Committee	£8,568
Chair of the Audit Working Group when a Co-opted Member	£8,568
Chair of Pension Fund Committee	£8,568
Locality Meeting Chair	£1,428
Adoption & Fostering Panel Members	£113 per Panel hearing
Police & Crime Panel Chair	£8,124

Option D) Indexation

13. The Council should also be aware that it has the opportunity, when adopting a Scheme of Allowances, to apply an index to Members' Allowances. In recent years, the Council has chosen to do this with regard to the pay award for local government staff. The effect of doing this is that, if in any given year there is no other change required to be made to a Scheme, the Scheme can remain unchanged except for an annual adjustment by virtue of the agreed index. While Council must still approve the Scheme each year, it need not undertake a fuller review each year in doing so while the index lasts.
14. It is recommended that Council may wish to do this whether the Panel's recommendations are accepted or not, applying such an index to any Scheme adopted.

Legal Implications

15. The Independent Remuneration Panel was convened under the Members' Allowances (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003. These regulations, arising out of the relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, require all local authorities to establish and maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to make recommendations to Council on the level of basic and special responsibility allowances and associated matters that are paid to councillors.
16. The Independent Remuneration Panel has reviewed Oxfordshire County Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances, and their recommendations are contained within this report.
17. It should be noted that officers will be undertaking an Equalities Impact Assessment on the Childcare and Dependant Care allowances, the findings of which will be reported to Council.
18. Therefore, Council can:
 - (a) Follow the Panel's recommendations in whole or in part.
 - (b) Agree a revised scheme of allowances, either in whole or in part, including a 'status quo' arrangement.
 - (c) Adopt an index to apply for a maximum period of 4 years.

Financial Implications

19. An additional budget of £130,837 would be required to meet the recommended Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances increases for current members in the financial year 2026-27.

There is an existing total budget of £30,000 that is expected to be sufficient for travel and other allowances

	Current Allowances	IRP Recommendation	Additional Budget Required	Increases

Basic Allowances	1,088,555	1,176,579	88,025	8.1%
Special Responsibility Allowances	493,469	536,281	42,812	8.7%
TOTAL	1,582,024	1,712,861	130,837	8.3%
Bucks, Oxfordshire, West Berks Health Overview & Scrutiny Chair - TBD	0			
TOTAL	1,582,024	1,712,861	130,837	8.3%

Comments checked by Bick Nguyen-McBride, Assistant Finance Business Partner

Equality & Inclusion Implications

20. Before making a decision, Section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, the need to:

- tackle prejudice; and
- promote understanding.

21. Public sector equalities duties have been considered by the IRP as part of their deliberations. Council's attention is drawn to paragraph 18 of the Legal Implications, contained within this report.

ANITA BRADLEY

Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Contact Officer:

Chris Reynolds, Senior Democratic Services Officer,
chris.reynolds@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Annex – Independent Remuneration Panel Report – December 2025

December 2025.

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES
Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel
to Oxfordshire County Council

December 2025

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

- A. The Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) has now carried out a full review of the County Council's scheme of members' allowances, and this report sets out the Panel's recommendations.
- B. The Local Government Act 2000 provides that before any new scheme of allowances is agreed, the Council is required to take into account the advice of its duly appointed Independent Remuneration Panel on the levels and types of allowances to be paid under that scheme.
- C. In summary, it's our view that the current levels of councillors' allowances are, in the main, lower than for comparable authorities and do not sufficiently recognise the time and workload involved. It's important too that an allowances scheme acts as a means of encouraging a diverse range of people to consider becoming county councillors in Oxfordshire. Clearly, allowances cannot be the only means of overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation; however, they are an important element. We consider our recommendations to be appropriate to the roles performed by county councillors in the service of the people of Oxfordshire.

Principles Adopted

- D. This was the first full review since December 2020. As such we considered this to be an opportunity to review the entire scheme of allowances by looking at each element afresh.
- E. We were also particularly mindful, and heard from many councillors, that part of the purpose of an allowances scheme is to encourage a diverse range of people to consider standing as councillors and undertaking responsible positions once elected.
- F. We decided to look objectively at the appropriate level for allowances, noting the relatively low level of the Council's allowances compared to other authorities in the region. As an Independent Remuneration Panel, we must be mindful of affordability, but our main task has been to assess the councillor and co-opted roles objectively.
- G. A Council's Independent Panel should therefore give an honest, benchmarked view of the level of allowances appropriate to the various roles and commitments of its County Councillors and Co-opted Members.

- H. The Panel's focus has been on reviewing the **roles** in question, within the Council's governance structure, and not on the persons occupying those roles. We have, however, taken the opportunity to consider the various approaches and levels of allowances set by comparable authorities across the South East and nationally.
- I. We noted that, following the IRP's review in 2020 the Council's Scheme introduced a cap of two Special Responsibility Allowances that any individual could claim. We also noted that most County authorities surveyed have a cap of only one SRA.
- J. As a starting point, we decided to review the Basic Allowance and use this as a base, with SRAs assessed in terms of multiples of the Basic Allowance. It was also important that we considered the fact that allowances are not a 'salary', are not payment for work done, but are intended to offset the cost of being a councillor so that no one is out of pocket as a result of representing their communities. That said, we were also mindful that becoming a councillor is a choice and has a voluntary element to it.
- K. We also wanted to hear directly from members of the Council themselves and so carried out a survey of all councillors and interviews with a selection of councillors and senior officers.

Recommendations

- (a) that the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors be increased by approximately 8%, from £14,268 to £15,420 per annum;
- (b) that, in addition to the Basic Allowance that Special Responsibility Allowances should be increased by a similar percentage resulting in to the figures shown in Appendix 1;
- (c) retain a cap such that no individual member of the Council should be entitled to receive more than two Special Responsibility Allowances at any one time;
- (d) a Co-optees' Allowance continues to be payable to an independent co-opted member of the Audit & Governance Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chair of the Audit Working Group, equivalent to Committee/Scrutiny Committee Chair and increased to £9,252;
- (e) the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and the Co-optees' Allowance to the Chair of the Audit Working Group be amended annually in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect; however, if the above increases are agreed, the pay award should not be applied to any increased allowances in 2026/27 but only from 2027/28. This will be limited to the four-year term of each council.
- (f) that Child and Dependant Carer's Allowances be increased: -
 - 1) Child Care: the hourly rate is equivalent to the Oxford Living Wage of £14.06 per hour capped at 120 hours per year, payable on production of receipts.

- 2) Dependant Carer: the hourly rate is twice the Oxford Living Wage i.e. £28.12 per hour capped at 120 hours per year, payable on production of receipts;
- (g) the Council retains, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers. Overnight accommodation is to be booked by officers where possible; when alternative accommodation arrangements are to be used, this should be approved by the relevant officer;
- (h) claims made under the Council's travel and subsistence scheme be accompanied by receipts and/or any other relevant evidence of the costs incurred and that claims under the scheme be made, in writing, within two months of the relevant duty in respect of which the entitlement to the allowance arises;
- (i) the list of Approved Duties for the purpose of travel, subsistence and dependant care allowances continue and be agreed as set out in the attached Annex 2;
- (j) the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowances be rounded to the nearest pound.

THE PANEL'S REPORT

Introduction

1. The Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 require local authorities to review their Allowances Schemes and to maintain an Independent Remuneration Panel to consider and make recommendations on new schemes. In brief, the Regulations say that the following issues are to be addressed by the Panel:
- a) Basic Allowance: each local authority must make provision for a basic, flat-rate allowance payable to all members. The allowance must be the same for each councillor; it can be paid either in a lump sum or in instalments.
- b) Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA): each local authority may make provision for the payment of SRAs for those councillors who have significant responsibilities. The Panel has to recommend the responsibilities that should be remunerated and the levels of the allowances.
- c) Co-optees' allowance: each local authority may make provision for the payment of an allowance to co-optees' for attending meetings, conferences and seminars.
- d) Childcare and dependant carers' allowance: local authorities may make provision for the payment of an allowance to those councillors who incur expenditure for the care of children or dependent relatives whilst undertaking particular duties.

- e) Travel and subsistence: each local authority may determine the levels of travel and subsistence allowances and the duties to which they should apply.
- f) Indexation: each local authority may determine that allowances should be increased in accordance with a specified index and can identify the index and set the number of years (not exceeding four) for which it should apply.
- g) Backdating: each local authority may determine that, where amendments are made to an allowances scheme, the allowances as amended may be backdated.

The Independent Remuneration Panel

- 2. The Independent Remuneration Panel for Oxfordshire County Council is: -
 - Ben Anim-Antwi
 - Martyn Hocking
 - Stephen Mckechnie
 - David Shelmerdine
- 3. The Panel elected David Shelmerdine as its Chair for this review.

Terms of Reference

- 4. To make recommendations to Oxfordshire County Council on the allowances:
 - a. that should be payable to County Councillors in Oxfordshire, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and to do so in the following circumstances:
 - b) annual recommendations on the Council's yearly scheme of allowances where the Council is minded to amend the scheme of allowances otherwise than by reference to a duly adopted index;
 - c) when the Council proposes to revise or modify any aspect of an existing scheme or the Council requests a review;
 - d) where required to do so by virtue of Regulations.
- 5. The County Council wished the Panel to undertake a comprehensive review of the Council's Scheme of Members' Allowances. This last occurred in December 2020, with changes to some aspects of Schemes since that time. In September 2025 the IRP issued an interim report with recommendations on the special responsibility allowances (SRAs) payable to leaders and shadow cabinet members in circumstances where there was more than one recognised official opposition group and on allowances payable to councillors taking parental leave.

The Panel's Work

- 6. We met four times as a Panel during 2025. On:

- 6 August
 - 27 August
 - 6 November
 - 26 November.
7. In conducting our review, we had regard to a significant amount of information, which included the following:
- The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 and of the Government's "Guidance on Consolidated Regulations on Members' Allowances for Local Authorities in England";
 - Details of the allowances of numerous other County Councils, especially those comparative authorities adjacent to Oxfordshire and in the South East generally;
 - Responses to a questionnaire to Oxfordshire County Councillors seeking comments on the Council's allowances scheme
 - The County Council's political management structure.

We also interviewed 11 members of the Council, seeking in our selection of interviewees to obtain a sample which was representative of the various roles performed by councillors. We also interviewed the Chief Executive Officer and the Monitoring Officer. The following councillors and officers were interviewed during September, October and November:-

Cllr Stefan Gawrysiak – Independent (non-aligned) Member
 Cllr Liz Leffman – Leader of the Council
 Cllr Ian Middleton – Leader of the Green Party Group
 Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE – Leader of the Labour and Co-operative Party Opposition Group
 Cllr Ben Higgins – Cabinet Member for Future Economy and Innovation
 Cllr Susanna Pressel – Labour and Co-operative Councillor for Jericho & Osney Division
 Cllr Dan Levy – Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation
 Cllr Gavin McLauchlan – Green Party Councillor for Benson & Crowmarsh Division
 Cllr Liam Walker – Leader of the Oxfordshire Alliance Opposition Group
 Cllr Mark Lygo – Chair of the Council
 Cllr James Barlow – Green Party Councillor for Wallingford Division

Martin Reeves – Chief Executive Officer
 Anita Bradley – Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

8. An online survey was sent to the 69 councillors and received 23 responses (33%).

Political Structure

9. We noted that the Council had operated a 'Leader and Executive Model' since 5 November 2001 and that the Council reinforced this commitment by adopting a Strong Leader model in August 2009. A Liberal Democrat administration is in place, operating a Cabinet system of decision-making, with a series of scrutiny committees providing challenge and policy focus. Since 2013, the Council has introduced informal locality meetings, all the County Councillors of that particular area meeting together. A number of more regulatory committees are also in operation to carry out statutory non-executive functions. All 69 councillors meet together as Council to agree the budget and policy framework. All councillors were also involved in the important task of community representation within their own electoral divisions.
10. We were therefore concerned in the current review to see if roles and responsibilities had changed over time, to gauge the time commitment involved and to assess the level of remuneration appropriate to the responsibilities and work done by councillors.

REVIEW OF ALLOWANCES

Basic Allowance

11. It is required under the relevant legislation that a Basic Allowance be provided to all members of the Council and that it must be of the same value for each. This allowance is intended to help compensate members for their time spent as a councillor, and covering incidental costs incurred by them as ordinary members of the Council, including the use of their homes.
12. In determining an appropriate level of Basic Allowance, we had regard to:
 - a) Oxfordshire County Councillors' own views as to the appropriate level of Basic Allowance (as expressed both in written submissions and in answer to interview questions);
 - b) The current level of Basic Allowance paid by the County Council and the value of the Council's Basic Allowance, relative to that paid by other County Councils, principally those immediately adjacent to Oxfordshire and in the South East;
 - c) The need to consider the voluntary service principle as required by statutory guidance.

What the Basic Allowance should cover

13. The Basic Allowance, in our view, is intended to recognise the many calls on a councillor's time including the costs associated with general constituency work. This includes the use of a councillor's home, home phone and utilities. In our view, it also covers time commitment integral to serving as an ordinary member (or substitute) of a formal meeting of the Council. We also noted that it is the Council's practice to deploy ICT devices to enable seamless working with the Council's systems. We felt that the Basic Allowance should be deemed to cover incidental user-consumables such as printer cartridges.

Voluntary element

14. We still hold the view that a proportion of a councillor's time should continue to be regarded as voluntary and as such should not be remunerated. It is our view that while the role of county councillor contains an element of voluntary activity – such as the aspiration to serve and represent constituents in the community – it is not appropriate or feasible to try to quantify this proportion. Furthermore, the pace of change and the immediacy of contemporary communication, including social media, mean that the demands of the role are ever more challenging. Consequently, no specific formula has been used to quantify these factors in the calculation of the allowances recommended in this report. Rather, we consider that they are bound up in the principle that an allowance is not a payment for work done but a recognition of the time, level of responsibility and personal exposure that such public duty requires.

Determination of the level of Basic Allowance

15. Our starting point was to consider the evidence received from councillors in relation to the Basic Allowance. There was broad consensus amongst councillors that the councillors' Basic Allowance is insufficient for the workload, especially for those without independent means, with families, or in full-time employment. Cabinet and leadership roles are also seen as under-remunerated given their demands. Allowances and the impact on means-tested benefits are seen as major barriers to attracting and retaining councillors from diverse backgrounds, younger people, and those with caring responsibilities. The panel noted, however, that the Government had commenced a consultation on restoring membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme for councillors in England
16. While the allowances scheme alone cannot facilitate a wider demography – the candidate selection of political parties, the governance structure of authorities play a significant part - realistic and benchmarked allowances are one way of contributing to a more level playing field.
17. We considered the various calls on County Councillors' time both in their constituency and formal roles (e.g. attending meetings, engaging with parish councils and community groups). We heard that County Councillors spend, on average, the equivalent of two full days per week on Council work. The Panel heard from councillors that the level of social media abuse had increased in recent years, in relation to national and local policies, which sometimes led to the involvement of police. The IRP took into account various calculation methods in reaching their conclusions including the Consumer Price Index (CPI), state pension increases and the UK national average salary.
18. We also looked at the levels of Basic Allowance paid by comparator County Councils, primarily in the South East but also other comparable County Councils across England. We found that Oxfordshire County Council had fallen behind, among South East counties, if not some others nationally, and that an increase was appropriate to rebalance the Basic Allowance to better support a more diverse range of people, reflective of Oxfordshire. The South East

Employers Survey on Members Allowances provided a useful benchmarking resource and a summary of the results is attached at Appendix 2. We deemed that an increase in the allowance to £15,420 (approximately 8%) was a modest but important step, sending a clear message about the importance of councillors' work in the community and helping facilitate a wider range of representation.

19. In achieving this, we wanted to continue to use the Basic Allowance as a base for assessing the various Special Responsibilities required within the Council.

We RECOMMEND that the Basic Allowance payable to all councillors be increased to £15,420.

Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA)

20. We then reviewed the posts that should qualify for an SRA and the appropriate level at which each allowance should be set.
21. We had regard to:
- a) The political management arrangements set out in the Council's Constitution, the responsibilities performed within that framework and the functions of the various roles.
 - b) The range and levels of SRA proposed in other County Councils and in the South East.
 - c) Evidence from Oxfordshire County Councillors (in person and through responses to the questionnaire) as to whether current SRAs are appropriate and as to suggestions for additional SRAs.

Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

22. We reviewed the roles for which SRAs are payable in the current allowances scheme, as listed in Appendix 1, and noted that a thorough review of these roles and responsibilities was undertaken during the previous full review in 2020. The IRP reached the conclusion that the roles and level of these allowances (as multiples of the basic allowance) continued to be appropriate, with the exceptions described below.

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairs

23. We noted that, although an SRA had been set for the Chair of the Horton Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the committee had not met for a considerable time and did not appear to be serving a role in the Council's governance structure. We believe that the SRA payable for this role should be subsumed into the allowance paid to the Chair of the Oxfordshire Joint Health and Overview Committee.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance to the Chair of the Horton Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee be deleted.

24. We also noted that, by rotation, the Council had taken the responsibility for the role of Chair of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Joint

Health and Overview Committee. Having reviewed the role and responsibilities attached to this position, and the practice of neighbouring authorities, we recommend that no allowance is payable for this position.

Minority/Third Party Group Leaders

25. We addressed whether leaders of minority parties should receive SRAs, considering group size thresholds and workload. We concluded that while the points raised by the Green Party Group were relevant, the additional burden was not sufficient to warrant a new SRA at this time.

Pension Fund Committee Members

26. During their interviews some councillors referred to the responsibilities in terms of the considerable ongoing training and detailed knowledge that was required of members appointed to the Pension Fund Committee. We concluded that while these additional responsibilities were demanding, the role was comparable to other committees such as the Planning and Regulation Committee and did not merit a distinct SRA for members, beyond its Chair.

Adoption and Fostering Panels

27. The Council introduced an allowance for a councillor who takes part in Adoption and Fostering Panel Meetings and we recommend that this should be continued with an increase to £120 capped at £1,500 per year based on the current trajectory that the Councillor serving on the Adoption Panel attends one such hearing per month.

We RECOMMEND that the Special Responsibility Allowance for member representatives on Adoption and Fostering Panels, be increased to £120 per Panel hearing capped at £1,500 per year.

Capping of Special Responsibility Allowances

28. We reviewed the cap on the number of Special Responsibility Allowances which any individual councillor could receive at any one time. A cap of 2 SRAs per member was recommended and introduced at the last review in 2020.
29. We noted that most other authorities in our survey limit the payment to one SRA per councillor, but have not recommended this further step this year so as to allow the Council best to consider its governance arrangements going forward, bearing this distinction in mind.

We RECOMMEND that the Council's Scheme retains a cap whereby a councillor may hold no more than two SRAs at any one time.

Child and Dependant Carers' Allowances

30. We agreed that the continuation of these allowances as part of a package of measures (including the increase in the basic allowance), was of significant importance, to encourage those with young families or care responsibilities to stand for Council in the coming years.
31. We considered the rates for hourly allowances for comparator County Councils in the South East and noted that the existing Oxfordshire rates are relatively low. As such, we benchmarked that against other councils' experience.
32. We believe a more realistic rate in this particular area is essential in demonstrating a commitment to enabling those with caring responsibilities to consider performing the role of a councillor. The Approved Duties in the Council's Scheme of Allowances provides a tangible set of circumstances for which such an allowance can be claimed, suitably evidenced.
33. We do not consider a councillor should be able to claim such expenses for care provided by family members. We feel the Scheme should recognise caring responsibilities in respect of dependent children under 16 or dependent adults certified by a doctor or social worker as needing attendance.
34. We considered it appropriate that the hourly rate should also take into account the Oxford Living Wage as a base for the Child Care allowance; and as a multiple of that (twice) for the Dependant Carer allowance. These allowance should be indexed to the Oxford Living Wage moving forwards. This is reflected in our recommendation.

We RECOMMEND that Child and Dependant Carers' Allowances continue to be paid on the basis that:-

- a) **Child Care: up to a maximum of £14.06 per hour for a child (i.e. Oxford living wage pertaining from time to time), to a maximum level of 120 hours per annum, on the production of receipts;**
- b) **Adult Care: up to £28.12 per hour for an adult (i.e. twice the Oxford living wage pertaining from time to time), to a maximum level of 120 hours per annum, on the production of receipts;**
- c) **Both the Child Care and Adult Care allowances be indexed to the Oxford Living Wage.**

Co-optees' Allowance

35. We continue in the view that there should not generally be a co-optees' allowance payable to all co-opted members on Council Committees, since they are not required to fulfil the wider responsibilities of a councillor. We are therefore not making a recommendation for such an allowance. We do however continue to endorse the principle that co-opted members should be able to claim travel and subsistence allowances, provided that these cannot be claimed legitimately from another body.
36. We remain of the view that the independent member of the Audit & Governance Committee should receive an allowance for carrying out the specific role of Chair of the Council's Audit Working Group, which reports to the Audit & Governance Committee. We concluded that the Chair of the Audit Working Group is a key role in the financial/business workings of the Council which should be remunerated.

We RECOMMEND that the co-optees' allowance to the independent co-opted member of the Audit Committee when the co-opted member serves as Chair of the Audit Working Group be set at 0.6 times the Basic Allowance i.e. increased to £9,252.

Indexation

37. A council can apply an index to their allowances and in such a circumstance, if the only change each year is the application of the index, then the Council does not formally need to adopt a scheme of allowances each year. We have for some years recommended linking members' allowances to the local government pay award for Oxfordshire County Council staff, by way of a percentage payment. We believe this is still appropriate particularly in the current economic climate. However, we are mindful that in this report we are already recommending increases to allowances for 2026/27 and so believe that the index should not be applied to that year.
- (k) **We RECOMMEND that the Council's Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances and the Co-optees' Allowance to the Chair of the Audit Working Group be amended annually in line with the percentage rise in overall employee costs for Oxfordshire County Council arising from by the annual Local Government Pay Award for staff and that this should take effect from the date on which the award for staff similarly takes effect; with the proviso that no such index should be applied during 2026/27 to any allowances that are increased either as recommended in this report or otherwise.**

Travelling and Subsistence Allowances

38. The Panel did not receive any strong views that the current basis of travel and subsistence allowances should change. However, whilst outside the specific remit of the Panel, we heard that the system for making claims was widely regarded as complex and difficult. The Panel discussed whether councillors should be able to claim the Oxford Congestion Charge as an expense,

ultimately agreeing to recommend consistency with the staff travel expenses policy which does not allow staff to reclaim the Oxford Congestion Charge . We noted the existing list of 'Approved Duties' (duties for which claims can be made) and suggest that the Council periodically reminds members of their right to make claims and how to do so.

We RECOMMEND that claims made under the Council's travel and subsistence scheme be accompanied by receipts and/or any other relevant evidence of the costs incurred and that claims under the scheme be made, in writing, within two months of the relevant duty in respect of which the entitlement to the allowance arises;

We RECOMMEND the Council retains, for members, the travel and subsistence scheme that is applicable to officers.

Amounts

39. We recommend that the monthly payment of the Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowance and Co-optees' Allowances should continue to be rounded so the nearest pound at the time they are set each year, to make it easier and clearer to identify the allowances for each role.

We RECOMMEND that the amounts for Basic Allowance, Special Responsibility Allowances and Co-optees' Allowances be rounded to the nearest pound at the time of their setting and after any indexation is applied.

Panel Monitoring Role

40. It was agreed that the panel would rely on the Council to notify them of any significant structural changes affecting the scheme, but would also hold an annual update meeting in October each year to stay informed and responsive.

Conclusion

41. In conclusion, the Panel considers the current levels of allowances to be, in the main, is low having regard both to the time and workload involved and, crucially, as a means of encouraging a diverse range of people to consider becoming county councillors in Oxfordshire. Clearly, allowances cannot be the only means of overcoming obstacles to wider democratic representation however they are an element.
42. We did hear from some members that they thought it would be beneficial if allowances were once again pensionable: it is not however open to us to suggest something not currently permissible in law. We noted that the Government had commenced a consultation on restoring membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme for councillors in England.
43. We consider our recommendations to be appropriate to the roles performed by county councillors in the service of the people of Oxfordshire. We understand it is for the Council to decide whether to accept these recommendations having

regard to the budgetary and political implications of so doing. Our role has been to present a Scheme we feel is reflective of the responsibilities of elected and co-opted members of Oxfordshire County Council.

44. We note that, following the establishment of new unitary authorities created as a result of the current review of Local Government structures in England, a further review of members' allowances will be required for the new council(s) in Oxfordshire.

David Shelmerdine

**Chair
Independent Remuneration Panel**

December 2025

On behalf of IRP members: -

**Ben Anim-Antwi
Martyn Hocking
Stephen Mckechnie**

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix 1

Scheme of Members' Allowances 2026-27 – Independent Remuneration Panel Report to Council – 9 December 2025

List of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs)

SRA Position	Multiplier (of basic allowance of £15,420)	New Allowance	Comments
Leader of the Council	x 3	£46,260	
Deputy Leader of the Council	x 2	£30,840	
Cabinet Member	x 1.6	£24,672	
Leader of the Opposition	x 1	£15,420	
Shadow Cabinet Member	x 0.25	£3,852	
Chair of the Council	x 0.85	£13,104	
Vice-Chair of the Council	x 0.25	£3,276	This is 0.25 of the Chair's SRA not the BA
Scrutiny Chairs	x 0.6	£9,252	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education & Young People • Health • Performance & Corporate Services • Place
Chair of Oxfordshire Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Horton Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee	x 0	£0	IRP suggest this is deleted
Chair of Planning & Regulation Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Audit & Governance Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of the Audit Working Group when a Co-opted Member	X 0.6	£9,252	
Chair of Pension Fund Committee	x 0.6	£9,252	
Locality Meeting Chair	x 0.1	£1,548	
Adoption & Fostering Panel Members			£120 for each attendance; capped at £1,500 per annum
Police & Crime Panel Chair	x 0.6	£9,252	

This page is intentionally left blank

SEE Members Allowances Survey 1 April 2025 – Comparative table – County and Unitary Councils

Council	Type	Basic Allowance (£)	Leader SRA (£)	Deputy Leader SRA (£)	Cabinet SRA (£)	Councillors	Total Budget (£)
Bracknell Forest Council	Unitary	9,624	32,075	19,244	17,642	41	611,620
Brighton & Hove City Council	Unitary	14,218	36,967	22,180	14,787	54	1,181,640
Buckinghamshire Council	Unitary	13,325	46,372	30,749	23,585	97	2,102,209
East Sussex County Council (2024 data)	County	14,314	40,008	20,459	17,535	50	1,005,000
Isle of Wight Council	Unitary	10,124	16,199	10,124	—	39	566,198
Kent County Council	County	16,267	53,493	34,771	34,771	81	2,404,300
Medway Council	Unitary	13,837	41,512	27,674	20,756	59	1,177,386
Milton Keynes City Council	Unitary	12,563	37,688	18,844	13,191	57	954,000
Oxfordshire County Council	County	13,824	41,472	27,648	22,116	69	1,368,800
Portsmouth City Council	Unitary	13,516	27,032	12,164	9,461	42	650,000
Reading Borough Council	Unitary	9,521	21,426	13,087	11,003	48	642,200
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	Unitary	9,348	28,044	15,423	14,022	41	650,000
Slough Borough Council	Unitary	9,772	25,405	17,783	13,973	42	616,000
Southampton City Council	Unitary	13,900	27,800	—	13,900	51	971,005
Surrey County Council	County	14,410	49,820	32,290	26,080	81	1,700,000
West Berkshire Council	Unitary	8,768	21,920	13,152	10,960	43	561,254
West Sussex County Council	County	14,450	37,491	27,141	24,125	70	1,400,000
Wokingham Borough Council	Unitary	7,784	20,000	—	10,000	54	579,860

Observations

- **Oxfordshire County Council** sits mid-range for basic allowance and SRAs compared to other counties.
 - Kent and Surrey lead in both basic allowance and SRAs.
 - Total budgets correlate strongly with council size (number of councillors).
 - Unitary councils generally have lower allowances and budgets than counties.
-

COUNCIL 9 December 2025

REVIEW OF MEMBER CHAMPIONS

Report of the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. **Council is RECOMMENDED to:**

amend the Council's Constitution to replace part 8.5, Member Champion Role with the text in Appendix 2.

Executive Summary

2. This report proposes some changes to the role and function of Member Champions and clarifies the appointment process for future Member Champions.
3. Cabinet at its meeting on 18 November 2025 agreed to propose these changes to the Audit & Governance Committee.
4. The Audit & Governance Committee at its meeting on 26 November 2025 agreed to propose the amendments to Council.

Background

5. The County Council operates a system of Member Champions, with an accompanying outline of their role and wider operational arrangements set out in the Council's Constitution attached as **Appendix 1**.
6. These roles are not remunerated and are non-decision making. Their role is to support the Cabinet Member and/or Leader to undertake their role effectively through examining specific areas of interest, engaging widely with stakeholder groups and ultimately drawing attention to matters of significance to the Cabinet Member and/or Leader.
7. Oxfordshire County Council currently has a set of Member Champion roles in the following areas. Their work has been to draw attention to issues within individual portfolios and, in some cases, draw together matters of strategic importance that cut across a series of portfolios.
 - (a) Active Travel and Cycling
 - (b) Public Transport

- (c) Future Generations
 - (d) Water Resources
 - (e) Military
 - (f) Marmot
 - (g) Mental Health and Wellbeing
 - (h) Youth Justice (new and vacant)
8. Members who have occupied those roles over the course of the municipal year have done so alongside existing commitments.
 9. This report proposes an update to the Council's Constitution to include clarity on the process of appointing and removing Member Champions.
 10. To help inform this work, enquiries have been made as to how other councils operate their Member Champion function in accordance with relevant legislative provisions. Proposals have been made in **Appendix 2** to strengthen the role and function of Member Champions as having a clearer reporting line to the Cabinet Member and/or Leader of the Council, and that their work needs to be agreed and reported back on a quarterly basis as a minimum. To further increase the transparency and accountability of Member Champions, it is proposed that a system of removal be introduced.
 11. It is proposed that the creation of Member Champion roles and the appointments to these roles do not need to be agreed by the whole Cabinet. This can be undertaken by the Leader using their executive power.
 12. By doing this, the Leader can act swiftly to make roles available and appoint. This has the additional benefit of reducing the unnecessary administrative burden of the current approach and enables the Cabinet to focus its resources on key decisions and other matters of strategic importance.

Financial Implications

13. None immediately arising from this report.

Thomas James, Head of Financial Services

Legal Implications

14. Member champions are elected members who take on additional responsibilities to their ordinary council responsibilities to assist in policy development or who provide advice and research to contribute to improved decision making. As such, these are non-statutory roles which have no voting powers.
15. To ensure appropriate transparency and accountability the Constitution provides a framework within which the member champions operate. The protocol aims to avoid any potential for confusion and overlap between the role of the member champion and those of the relevant executive member or

overview and scrutiny members, who hold statutory responsibilities under various Acts of Parliament for local authority governance.

16. In order to amend the Constitution, any changes are usually considered by the Audit & Governance Committee who are charged with auditing governance processes to ensure they are effective. The Committee considered a report at its meeting on 26 November 2025 and agreed to recommend the amendments to the Council.

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer
anita.bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

17. None immediately arising from this report.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

18. None immediately arising from this report.

Sustainability Implications

19. None immediately arising from this report.

Risk Management

20. None immediately arising from this report.

Consultations

21. None immediately arising from this report.

ANITA BRADLEY
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Appendices:

- Current protocol in the Constitution – Appendix 1
- Proposed protocol in the Constitution – Appendix 2
- List of current member champions and vacant posts – Appendix 3

Contact Officer:
Susmita Dave – Senior Policy Officer

November 2025

This page is intentionally left blank

MEMBER CHAMPION ROLE

GUIDANCE NOTES

1. Introduction

This guidance outlines the responsibilities of a Member Champion including a person profile and an appointment process.

2. Person Profile

Key role: promoting and facilitating proper consideration of the issues in the execution of all aspects of the Council's roles and engaging with the community to promote support. The following list outlines the qualities which a champion will either have or develop as they exercise this role.

You should be:

- a) A councillor who is familiar with the topic. You could be a Cabinet Member or a Chair or Deputy Chair of a Committee or other member of the Council. You will have support from officers as appropriate. You would be expected to demonstrate your knowledge base and/or your enthusiasm for the topic.
- b) A good communicator and able to use your skills to promote the benefits of the topic within the Council and externally. You should be able to persuade colleagues both within the Council and in the wider community of the benefits which the topic can offer.
- c) A consensus builder, able to bring together the various stakeholders within the authority, interest groups and the wider community.
- d) Able to see the 'bigger picture' and help develop a vision.

You should have:

- e) A commitment and passion for the topic. While a working knowledge of current issues relating to the topic would be an advantage, it is by no means essential. Professional skills within Council will complement your enthusiasm for the subject.
- f) An understanding of the workings of the Council and an appreciation of the role that each can play in promoting and encouraging the topic.
- g) A track record of supporting the topic would be an advantage.

3. Duties

The key objective for an elected member nominated to act as a Member Champion is to support and encourage the Council in its work to ensure that the promotion and encouragement of the topic plays a central role in the development and implementation of all its policies and strategies. This will involve engagement with stakeholders and other partners both within the Council and externally. The key responsibilities and tasks will depend on you and the time you can devote to the role. You might be thought of as the “conscience” of the Council for this topic. However, your support for the topic would need to be tempered by financial and economic realities and by other pressures which the Council faces. You might serve the Council best by bringing examples of innovative and “out of the box” thinking to the role.

4. Nomination

Nomination can be by the following means, or a combination:

- a) A scrutiny or other committee can nominate a suitable person.
- b) Members or officers can nominate a suitable person.
- c) Local interest groups can identify and approach an elected member to take on the role.
- d) A suitable councillor can volunteer.

5. Procedure

Member Champions will be asked to report either:

- a) formally: to the nominating body in a specified cycle (e.g. annually); or
- b) informally: through internal journals, briefings.

This must be formally advised at the time of appointment.

MEMBER CHAMPION ROLE

GUIDANCE NOTES

1. Introduction

This guidance outlines the responsibilities of a member champion including a person profile and an appointment process.

2. Background

Member champions are discretionary roles, appointed by the Leader of the Council to champion a specific cause and support the relevant cabinet member.

The member champion will work to raise the profile of their interest in the community with the approval of the cabinet member.

3. Scope of the Role

The work of the member champion should complement the work of the relevant cabinet member.

The member champion will have their work programme set by the Leader, in consultation with the relevant cabinet member and director, identifying the most relevant community groups whose work is associated with their interest and foster good working relationships with those contacts.

The member champion will report back to the cabinet member on a quarterly basis to keep them abreast of information relating to their cause. Champions are not decision makers and will be supported in their work by the appropriate resources to ensure that their role is one that informs and educates the cabinet member, making it clear what is within the council's power or influence to those they interact with outside the council.

A member champion cannot make decisions and must not commit the council in any way or in a manner that could be interpreted as being contrary to established policy and practice and must not commit the council in any way or in any manner (including financially).

Where there is potential for confusion and overlap between the role of the member champion and the relevant cabinet member, it is important that member champions are clear about their role and what they can and cannot do and must also take care not to impinge on issues outside their area of interest.

Member champions should consult with the council's communications team before speaking to the media.

Member champions speak on behalf of the council in this role and so are expected not to take any party political credit for the work they do in this role.

Member champions do not receive any further allowance for their role (except for normal expense claims permitted by council) and as such should not be compelled to take on more responsibilities than they feel comfortable committing to; they therefore should carefully consider their initial appointment to the role.

As with all councillor roles, member champions will be committed to the values of the council and the values in public office as set out in the councillors' code of conduct.

4. Profile of Member Champions

You should be:

- a) A councillor who is familiar with the topic. Member champions must not be Cabinet Members or Chairs of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (including HOSC).
- b) A good communicator and able to use your skills to promote the benefits of the topic within the Council and externally. You should be able to persuade colleagues both within the Council and in the wider community of the benefits which the topic can offer.
- c) A consensus builder, able to bring together the various stakeholders within the authority, interest groups and the wider community.
- d) Able to see the 'bigger picture' and help develop a vision.

You should have:

- e) A commitment and passion for the topic. While a working knowledge of current issues relating to the topic would be an advantage, it is by no means essential. Professional skills within Council will complement your enthusiasm for the subject.
- f) An understanding of the workings of the Council and an appreciation of the role that each can play in promoting and encouraging the topic.
- g) A track record of supporting the topic would be an advantage.

5. Appointments Process

A member champion can be any member of the council, but not a Cabinet Member or a Chair of a relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee (including HOSC).

Member champions are appointed by the Leader in consultation with the relevant cabinet member and exist to raise the profile of issues which are important to the council.

A member champion will normally be expected to serve a one-year term.

An appointment may be made during the term of office to any new position that is agreed by the Leader and relevant cabinet member or to a position where there is a vacancy that the Leader believes should be filled.

The Leader may remove a member champion during their term in consultation with the relevant cabinet member if the conditions of their role are breached or if the need for the champion no longer exists

6. Procedure

Member Champions will work with the Leader of the Council, cabinet member and a relevant Director to agree a programme of work and engagement aligned to the work of the executive.

They will be asked to maintain a close working relationship with the Cabinet Member and report to their Cabinet Member as a minimum on a quarterly basis.

This must be formally advised at the time of appointment.

This page is intentionally left blank

Champion Title	Councillor Responsible	Additional Information
Active Travel and Cycling	Cllr Emily Kerr	
Public Transport	Cllr Chris Brant	
Future Generations	Cllr Gareth Epps	
Water Resources	Cllr Andy Graham Cllr Peter Stevens	
Military	Cllr Liz Leffman	<i>The Leader of the Council (or such other person as nominated) acts as Armed Forces Champion on behalf of the County, then each military base has a champion who acts as a point of contact</i>
Marmot	Cllr Bethia Thomas	
Mental Health and Wellbeing	Cllr Robin Jones	
Youth Justice	Vacancy	

Military Champions

Military Champion

Cllr Liz Leffman

Military Champion - Bicester Garrison

Cllr Matt Webb

Military Champion - RAF Benson

Cllr Gavin McLauchlan

Military Champion - RAF Brize Norton

Cllr Toyah Overton

Military Champion - Abingdon Station

Cllr Tom Greenaway

Military Champion - Vauxhall Barrcks

Cllr Ian Snowdon

Military Champion - Shrivenham

Cllr Bethia Thomas