

Annual report

2023 - 2024

Working in partnership
to make Oxfordshire a greener,
fairer and healthier county.

Greener

Fairer

Healthier



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

Foreword

Welcome to Oxfordshire County Council's annual report, providing an overview of our performance and key achievements from April 2023 to March 2024.

Our vision is to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county, and this is centred around strong local communities, healthy places to live and a zero-carbon economy that benefits everyone.

Including everyone lies at the heart of our vision. This means providing inclusive services with equal access for all; working with communities to tackle disadvantage, inequality, public health and care issues; and providing an inclusive workplace with equality of opportunity. We want to enable people across the county to be happy, healthy, safe and successful, from getting the best start in life to ageing well and remaining as independent as possible for as long as possible.

We also want to ensure that our decision-making process is inclusive, providing different opportunities for communities to make their views known on the issues that matter to them.

Tackling climate change underpins all we do as the climate emergency is the biggest challenge the planet faces. Our commitment to net zero is shown by the fact that we were ranked as the top-performing county council waste disposal authority for the tenth year running and the top county council for action on climate change according to Climate Emergency UK's 2023 council climate scorecard assessment.

Our strategic plan 2022 - 2025 sets out our nine cross-cutting priorities (see page 4) and details how we will deliver our vision and commitments.

Our budget, set in February 2024, also supports the continued delivery of our plan, which is reviewed annually, and allows us to both invest in our priorities and meet our demand pressures for the year ahead. We listened carefully to the feedback given in our residents' survey and in our budget consultation and engagement events and invested £10.6 million in the things you said we should focus on. This means we'll continue to protect those in need, while investing in

roads and improving services for children and families, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities.

Social care services for adults and children accounts for around half our spend. We also provide services such as fire and rescue, highway maintenance, libraries, registration (births, deaths and marriages), education and trading standards. Our annual report highlights examples of this important work and progress against our priorities.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. As we look forward to 2024 - 25, we will continue to ensure that we provide the greatest opportunities possible for every resident to live their best life.

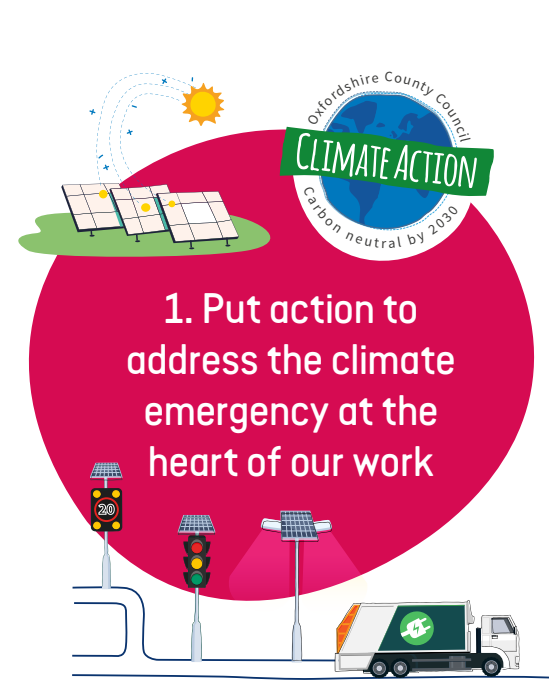


**Councillor
Liz Leffman,**
Leader of
Oxfordshire
County Council

Our nine priorities

Our vision

To lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county.



Greener

Fairer

Healthier

The climate emergency

Our strategic priority

Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work



- We helped residents recycle, reuse or compost 57.2 per cent of household waste, making us the **top-performing county council waste disposal authority for the tenth year running**.

- We were rated the **top county council for action on climate change** in Climate Emergency UK's 2023 council climate scorecard assessment.

- We were awarded £6.4 million by the government to provide **energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating** to low-income households living in fuel poverty.

- We have almost **completed our LED street lighting conversion programme**, which will cut costs and emissions by almost 70 per cent, saving 6,000 tonnes of CO2 each year.

- We were awarded £41,000 to establish **disposable vapes recycling collection points**, helping to reduce littering and ensure their safe disposal.

- We were awarded £3.6 million by the government to **triple the number of public electric vehicle chargers** in the county, which will bring 1,300 more chargers by the end of 2025.

- We secured a £2.9 million grant to support the **decarbonisation of 26 of our county council sites**, with delivery starting in 2024/25.

- We completed the **installation of electric vehicle chargers** at community support service sites in preparation for 10 new electric minibuses arriving in spring 2024.



- We launched a **strategy to tackle poor air quality** and together with our city and district council partners launched a new Oxfordshire air quality website, providing guidance and resources.

- We supported **over 100 community action groups** to take action on environmental issues across Oxfordshire. This was featured as best practice in a national report.

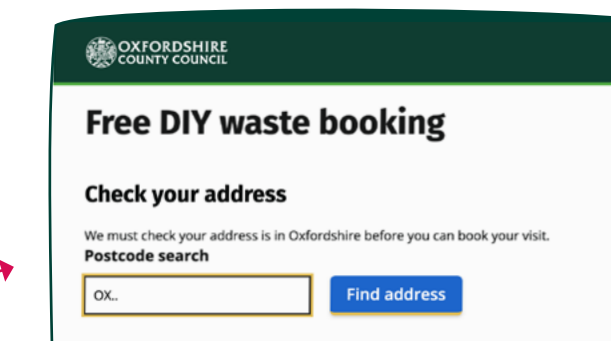
- We introduced an **online booking system** to support a change in legislation on DIY waste at our household waste recycling centres.

- We delivered a **food waste recycling project**, visiting 13,000 households across the county to encourage residents to recycle their food waste.

- Our pilot scheme for **flood wardens** now has 11 volunteers covering two parishes and one town.

- We developed a **heat health action plan** to support vulnerable residents during possible heatwaves and planning for extreme heat.

- We convened a '100 Together' conference in January 2024, bringing together policy makers, business leaders, academics and investors to discuss how we can **unlock the investment needed to deliver environmental activity at scale** in Oxfordshire.



Greener



Greener

Travel and transport

Our strategic priority

Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network

Greener

- **20mph speed limits** were introduced in Abingdon, Thame and Wallingford, with applications from parishes topping 230. The scheme is designed to save lives, reduce congestion, improve air quality, and encourage cycling and walking.

- In partnership with bus operators, we launched **one of the biggest UK fleets of electric buses outside London**. The £83.8 million project will deliver 159 new battery buses onto the roads of Oxford.



- We secured £17.3 million of funding from Homes England to help fund the **A34 Lodge Hill interchange scheme**. The main construction of the new south-facing A34 slip roads is due to start in autumn 2024.
- We **completed three major infrastructure programmes**, including the remodelling of the A41 Ploughley Road junction, improvements to the Oxford North highway, and work on the North Oxford Corridor between Loop Farm roundabout and Cassington Road.

- We **started construction work on several major infrastructure schemes**, including upgrading the junction of the A4095 and Banbury Road in Bicester and improvements to the Kidlington roundabout.
- We increased the number of FixMyStreet super users to 130, covering 95 parishes across the county. They **reported and instructed repairs to 1,379 defects to potholes and kerbing** on county roads.



- Together with our contractor Milestone Infrastructure, we trialled an **innovative method of road resurfacing**, which reduces carbon by 50 per cent and avoids thousands of tonnes of construction waste.
- We awarded £425,000 in grants to 12 organisations to **help improve community transport** in Oxfordshire, including funding new vehicles, expanding schemes and providing new services.
- We were awarded £2.384 million by Active Travel England to invest in projects to **improve walking and cycling infrastructure** in the county.
- 74 per cent of people who participated in our active travel outreach project reported they had **increased their frequency of walking, cycling or wheeling**.

Greener



Nature and green spaces

Our strategic priority

Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces



- We were named by the government as a **'responsible authority' for driving nature recovery**, with accompanying funding to help us develop a nature recovery strategy to tackle habitat loss, safeguard our fragile ecosystems, and create nature-rich landscapes.

- Our countryside access team **repaired and replaced 106 bridges and cleared 320km of vegetation**.

- We secured funding to provide much needed **access improvements to the public rights of way that make up the 65 mile Green Belt Way**.



- We received 50 submissions from residents for a tree and woodland planting project and secured funding to create **20 new community orchards**.

- Our tree service team helped a group of volunteers in Wantage **plant 14 apple trees** in one day to create an orchard that will be available for the local community to enjoy for years to come.

- We created an in-house **tree aftercare and planting service**, who in their first four weeks of operation planted 150 trees.



- We inspected more than 3,700 individual or groups of trees, and arranged and completed more than **3,843 tree care operations**.

- We set up a **tree guardians scheme** – a network of volunteers to look after thousands of newly planted trees on public land across Oxfordshire.



- We transferred the lease of a council-owned meadow in Swinford to the owners of the Thames Valley wildflower meadow restoration project to help create a **nature recovery network and habitat corridor** linking a series of ancient meadows.

- Using £200,000 from developer funding, we resurfaced bridleways in Botley and Heyford Park, improved a footpath in Watchfield, and undertook improvements at Crowell to **improve access to the countryside**.



Greener

Greener

Tackling inequalities

Our strategic priority

Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire

- We completed **community insight profiles** for the 10 areas in Oxfordshire most likely to experience health inequalities, providing an in-depth understanding of local communities to help inform support.

- We set up a **community research network**, with funding support from UK Research and Innovation, to carry out research into what makes people healthy, helping to improve health and tackle inequalities across the county.

- We scaled up our Better Housing Better Health programme by 200 per cent **to meet the needs of households facing fuel poverty**.

- We launched a new residents' support scheme and provided 3,620 vulnerable households in financial crisis with **emergency financial support** to cover food, energy and essential household costs.

- Over 3,500 people on low incomes, who weren't eligible for the equivalent national payments, benefited from our **£450 cost of living payments**.

- We provided £2.1 million through the city and district councils to **reduce council tax** bills and provide **additional housing support to people on low incomes**.

- We spent £3.5 million ensuring families of children entitled to free school meals received **support with food costs** during the school holidays.



- 9,622 people attended our **digital and information support sessions** in libraries, and library users clocked up over **87,000 hours of free access time** on library computers.

- We provided a £300,000 grant to advice agencies in the county to provide **debt and benefits advice** to people affected by the cost of living crisis.

- As a key partner in the Oxfordshire Migration Partnership - which includes local authority, health and voluntary and community sector partners - we **supported over 2,600 Ukrainian guests** staying in the county and helped **more than 100 Afghan citizens** settle into their own homes and communities.

- We developed a **£1.2 million employment investment programme** to support Ukrainians into work, with wider benefits created for other migrant groups.

- We signed a pledge to become a **council of sanctuary**, committing to provide a warm welcome for all new arrivals and support independent living for those staying in the county.



Fairer



Fairer

Local democracy

Our strategic priority

Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy

- We supported over **360 cabinet and cabinet member decisions** in 2023 compared to 250 in 2022.
- An **Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee** was established following a recommendation by the Future Council Governance Group. The first meeting of the new committee was held in January 2024.
- We completed the first three phases of the **Local Government Boundary Commission for England electoral review**, which is reviewing political boundaries across the county.
- Working with town and parish councils, we **co-developed a charter** to help shape how we can work together in partnership to support better service delivery and ensure thriving local democracy across the county.
- We launched an online **citizens' portal** to share our performance data with residents in a more accessible and engaging way.

- We introduced an **online budget simulator** for our 24/25 budget consultation, with over 1,300 people using it to weigh up choices, make trade-offs and have their say on where we should focus savings and spending.
- We launched a monthly **consultations e-newsletter** to provide updates about and invitations to participate in our consultations and surveys.
- We launched a **new look homepage for our website**, designed to help people find the information they need quickly and easily.



Fairer

Local businesses and partners

Our strategic priority

Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit

- We successfully transitioned the **Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP)** to the county council.
- As part of the Joint Oxfordshire resilience team, we distributed 1,342 community resilience bags to **make vulnerable households safer** and business continuity assessments to 513 small businesses to **help them prepare for emergencies**.
- As part of our work with the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, we supported the creation of an **anchor institution network**, which brings together large organisations to create a more equal and sustainable region.
- We created **over £1.9 million in social value** through our tendering activities to add value for local communities, from using local businesses in our supply chain to using local residents employed on local contracts.
- We launched **Heritage Search**, an online catalogue of more than 1 million of Oxfordshire's records, images and objects.

Fairer

- Our trading standards team conducted over **1,790 interventions with Oxfordshire businesses**, providing advice and support, testing products and procedures. They also provided over **500 small businesses with quick reviews** to help improve their resilience.
- Our fire and rescue service completed **464 fire safety audits** of commercial premises and 692 fire safety building regulations consultations.
- We secured £3.8 million of government funding to help Oxfordshire **become part of a new 5G innovation region**. The money will be invested initially in two major 5G projects – East West Rail between Bicester and Bletchley, and Harwell Science and Innovation Campus.



Health and wellbeing

Our strategic priority

Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents

Healthier

- Together with NHS and local authority partners and Healthwatch Oxfordshire, we developed a **health and wellbeing strategy for Oxfordshire**, working with a wide range of community groups and consulting over 1,000 residents.
- Our Good Food project worked with a retail marketing expert to develop relationships with convenience stores in priority areas to **provide healthier food options**.
- We delivered 18,506 **NHS health checks** across the county to those aged between 40 and 74.
- We distributed **39,000 condoms and 16,318 testing kits** to help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections.



- Our specialist stop smoking service, Stop for Life Oxon, has supported around **1,000 people to quit smoking**, providing free behavioural support and quit aids.
- Our smoke free community fund supported five projects and shared £2,850 to support a range of **smoke free initiatives**.

- We trained 545 staff and volunteers to use the **Making Every Contact Count approach** when speaking to people about their health and wellbeing. Over 8,700 conversations using this approach took place in our libraries.
- We delivered **2,702 safe and well home visits** and installed over **1,400 alarms** (981 smoke alarms, 120 heat alarms and 313 carbon monoxide alarms).
- Our fire and rescue and trading standards teams **tested 769 electric blankets**, with 35.5 per cent identified as unsafe for use.



- We fitted 28 call blockers in residents' homes to **protect them from scam and nuisance calls**. The 206 units we have fitted to date have led to 194,879 calls being blocked, with estimated savings to residents, police, social care and the NHS of over £2.9 million.
- Our public health and trading standards team **restricted children's access to vapes**, visiting over 34 retailers and seizing over 4,600 non-compliant devices.
- In partnership with Oxfordshire Mind, we rolled out five mental health and suicide prevention training courses to 40 delegates to help **support the mental health and wellbeing of our residents**.
- Our trading standards officers saved, or recovered, over £194,000 for **victims of scams, doorstep crime and other frauds**, as well as reaching 3,478 people with preventative advice and support.



Healthier

Carers and social care

Our strategic priority

Support carers and the social care system

Healthier

- Together with partners, we continued to make a positive impact with **The Oxfordshire Way** - supporting people to live healthy and independent lives in their own homes for as long as possible.
- In the latest round of our community capacity grants, we awarded 92 grassroots projects funding of up to £20,000 to **help isolated people stay connected, healthy and active** in their community.
- Progress in timely **adult social care assessments and reviews** achieved a 46 per cent reduction on April 2021 waiting times. The longest wait time for an assessment reduced by 56 per cent.
- On behalf of our partners, we secured almost £470,000 through the Accelerating Reform Fund that will be used to **scale up existing work in adult social care** throughout the region.
- We funded 86 small community enterprises, who support over 1,284 people to **stay independent in their own homes**.

- Working with the people we support, we co-produced **three improvements to our community support services** – opening the Cheers M'Dears pub room and Ta Da! beauty room in Banbury, as well as the Glitz & Glam salon in Witney.



- We supported more people **to live in their local communities for longer**, arranging 1,764 packages of home care.
- Our reablement service supported people being discharged directly home from hospital to regain their independence, with **78 per cent achieving full reablement**.
- The first tenants moved into their newly developed, specially adapted home in Witney – the first of five properties for adults with additional needs to **help them live well within their own communities**.
- Our customer service centre handled 26,271 inbound phone calls about adult social care, of which **87.7 per cent were resolved at first point of contact**.
- Our partnership with the Care Workers' Charity supported over 900 care and support workers with grants to **support people in a caring job** to pay for the costs of starting work.

- We published an **all age unpaid carers strategy**, which was co-designed with over 200 carers, and developed action plans with partners to improve the experience of unpaid carers across Oxfordshire.
- With funding from the Department for Work and Pensions, we **improved work opportunities for people with a learning disability or autism**. 89 people have signed up to the programme of support in the last year and 18 people have already successfully secured paid employment.
- With the help of government funding, we supported **43 care leavers who were at high risk of homelessness**.
- Three care leavers are undertaking apprenticeships** as youth support workers and cultural participation officers within our services.

- We co-produced a **Care Leaver Survival Guide** jointly with children who have experience of Oxfordshire's care system, to help support young people preparing for adulthood and leaving care.
- We supported **1,744 carers with a direct payment** to support their wellbeing.
- Over 150,000 visits were made to **Live Well Oxfordshire**, our website offering information about activities, groups and organisations for adults with a variety of needs.



Healthier

Children and young people

Our strategic priority

Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential

Healthier

- Our **children's services were judged 'good'** following an inspection by Ofsted in February 2024. Our services were rated as good across all five areas of inspection criteria.
- Our **Glebelands assessment home was rated 'outstanding'** by Ofsted, while our children's homes The Moors and The Oaks retained their 'good' Ofsted rating following inspections.
- We **completed the phased transfers** (primary to secondary) for all 568 children with education, health and care plans **within the statutory time frame**.
- We approved £2.23 million to create **23 new places at Mabel Prichard Special School** in Oxford to increase quality local facilities and support for SEND children.

- We approved a £2.5 million programme of work to improve the infrastructure of **North Hinksey CE Primary School** and a £2.8 million programme of renovation to **Bloxham Church of England Primary School**.



- £14.4 million is being invested in a **new school in Didcot for children with special educational needs and disabilities** (SEND). The school, which has a projected opening date of September 2029, will have capacity to teach 120 children.

- An Oxfordshire **SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board** was set up to drive the actions required to deliver better services for SEND children, young people and their families.
- Information and resources for SEND professionals and parents and carers were strengthened with the introduction of **e-newsletters, refreshed webpages and Q&A events**.
- Working with the BookTrust charity, our library service secured £181,489 to **support early speech and language development**, and we reached more than 90 per cent of babies with books and other resources.



- We set up a new healthy child and young person public health service, delivered by Oxford Health, to support all 4 year-olds in the county to be **ready for school**.
- Thanks to additional funding from the Department for Education's Employer Support Fund, we increased the number of **children and family social work apprenticeships** we offer from two to 10 a year.
- 7,784 children attended our **Junior Citizens Safety Centre** to find out how to keep themselves safe and respond effectively in the event of an emergency.
- We offered cycle training to 95 per cent of primary schools across the county, **delivering cycle training to over 6,100 children**.



Healthier

Awards



- We won **best climate action and decarbonisation initiative** in the 2023 Association for Public Service Excellence Service Awards for our energy insights tool and energy flexibility trials, showing the crucial role local authorities can play in moving away from the use of fossil fuels.
- Together with Oxford City Council we won the **Exemplary Contribution to Net Zero Award** at the UK National Transport Awards for our collaboration on the Oxford zero emission zone scheme.
- We received a commendation in the sustainability category and the technology and innovation category at the **2023 Chartered Institute for Highways and Transportation Awards** for our zero emission zone scheme.

- Together with our contractor Milestone Infrastructure, we were recognised in three categories of the **2023 Highways Awards** for our collaboration on the North Oxford Corridor improvement project, including winning the Environmental Sustainability Award for decarbonisation.

- Our Libraries' Business and Intellectual Property Centre team won the Children's Award in the 2023 **National Libraries Connected Awards** for introducing hundreds of children and young people to entrepreneurship.

- Our schools' catering team won a 2023 Association for Public Service Excellence Performance Network Award for **most improved performer in catering services**.

- The house project from the care leavers' service won **Oxford Brookes University's Celebrating Excellence in Practice Education 2023 Award** for being an outstanding placement partner, supporting social work trainees to succeed.



- We received a **bronze Carbon Literacy Organisation Award** for our training programme, which has delivered carbon literacy training to 200 employees and councillors.

- We won a 2023 **Chartered Institute of Public Relations PRide Award** for the launch of our internal recognition programme.

- Our apprenticeship team won the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's **Large Apprenticeship Employer of the Year Award 2023** for our work in providing a high-quality apprenticeship experience.

- Our visual impairment and access to greenspace project, funded by Natural England, won the 'Best example of research making an impact' at the 2024 **Outdoor Recreation Network Awards**.

- We were shortlisted for communications campaign of the year in the **2023 LGC Awards** for a recruitment campaign for on-call fire fighters, which received 60 applications against a target of 18.

- We were shortlisted for the **MJ Awards' innovation in children's and adults' services category** for our Cheers M'Dears pub room in Banbury, which provides a social space for members of our community support service.

- Three of our social workers – Helen Barker, Katherine Elliott and Tatiana Lucena – won awards from the **British Association of Social Workers**.

- The Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock was nominated for the **Muddy Stiletto's Best Family Attraction 2024**.

- We were shortlisted for a **Comms 2.0 award for our smoking cessation communications campaign**, which resulted in a 46 per cent increase in visits to the Stop for Life website and a 42 per cent increase in referrals to the Stop for Life service.

- Jamie Kavanagh, our senior policy officer for inequalities, won the **Freemen of Oxford Award for information and communication and technology** for his work on inclusion and diversity in data management.

- Firefighter and LGBT+ champion Charlotte Stacey was awarded a **British Empire Medal** for her services to the community.



- Will Pedley, one of our senior transport planners, won the **Transport Planning Society's Transport Planner of the Year 2023**.

- Kath Hunt, our Youth Justice and Exploitation Manager, received a **Thames Valley Police Commendation** for her multi-agency work to prevent exploitation in one area of the county.

- Alison Brookman, Assistant Team Manager and Violence Reduction Coordinator, was awarded the **Thames Valley Police Laycock Award for problem solving** to recognise her work responding to issues of serious violence and anti-social behaviour.

2023/24 in figures



We recorded **7,446** births and **6,494** deaths.



We conducted and registered **2,578** civil partnership and marriage ceremonies, and registered **532** religious marriages.



We conferred British citizenship on **1,973** new citizens.



Our fire and rescue service attended **6,361** emergencies.



Our highways teams maintained **3,000** miles of road, **2,000** miles of footway, **1,200** bridges, **400,000** highway trees and **80,000** streetlights.



We spent over **£2m** repairing potholes, with more than **30,000** defects repaired.



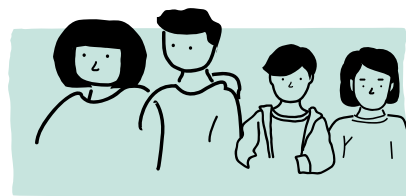
94.59 per cent (6,613) of applicants were awarded their first choice of primary school in Oxfordshire for 2024/25.



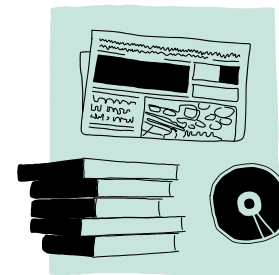
Our portable antiquities team, who help preserve and protect local heritage finds and treasures, saw a **25 per cent** increase in the recording of treasure cases.



88.24 per cent (6,492) of applicants were awarded their first choice of secondary school in Oxfordshire for 2024/25.



1,909,185 people visited our libraries.



Our libraries loaned **3,613,485** books and other items.



We currently have **300** apprentices on programmes across the council. Our apprenticeship achievement rate currently stands at **80 per cent**, exceeding the Department for Education's ambition of **67 per cent**.



We spent **£496,000** on refurbishing **15** of our libraries.



Performance and feedback

Performance summary

This summarises the progress we have made delivering against the activities, tasks and projects outlined in our strategic plan under each of the nine strategic priorities.

The bi-monthly business management and monitoring reports can be found here for further detail of achievements and action plans.

mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk

Listening and learning

Throughout the year we provide opportunities to our residents to have their say. Whether through customer satisfaction surveys, consultations on our budget, new projects and services, talking to local business organisations or feedback through our website; we are keen to listen to what you like and what needs to be improved.

letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk



Finance

What we spent on council services

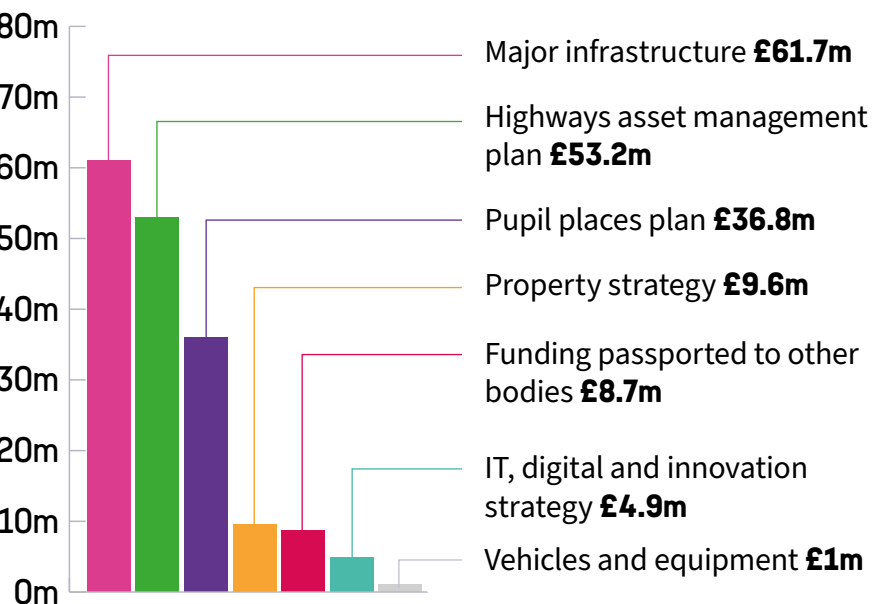
In 2023/24 the council spent **£894.9m** on services – our gross expenditure budget. The chart below shows how we spent our budget on services in 2023/24.

- 51%** Adult and children's social care
- 18%** Education and learning
- 9%** Highways and transport
- 7%** Capital borrowing and other financial costs (eg contingency and reserves)
- 5%** Public health improvement and prevention services
- 4%** Waste disposal and recycling
- 4%** Fire and rescue and community safety
- 2%** Culture and customer experience



Capital programme

In 2023/24, we spent **£175.9m** on capital projects which included investment in highway improvements, new school buildings, Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) electric buses and energy efficient street lighting. This money can only be used for the purpose it has been given and cannot be allocated to day-to-day council spending.



Contact us:

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