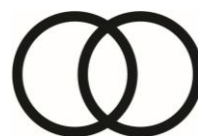


Embedding Community Wealth Building into Oxfordshire County Council

A Framework for Action



CLES
the national organisation
for local economies

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Presented to the Capital City Partnership, October 2022

Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES)
info@cles.org.uk
www.cles.org.uk
@CLEStinkdo

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Summary of Recommendations

Economic Development:

- 1) Prioritise Community Wealth Building in economic development practice.
 - a. Establish a vision for progressive local economic development.
 - b. Capture impact through a broad set of metrics.
 - c. Ensure officer capacity to deliver economic development practices informed by the five community wealth building principles.

Spending and Procurement:

- 2) Leverage procurement for Community Wealth Building in Oxfordshire.
 - a. Ensure procurement leads are supported to incorporate community wealth building approaches into practice.
 - b. Analyse collective levels of local authority spend in Oxfordshire.
 - c. Support the development of locally relevant TOMs.¹
 - d. Engage potential suppliers.

Land and Property:

- 3) Deepen the progressive practice of land use and disposal across the Oxfordshire footprint.
 - a. Use surplus public land to support affordable housing and business space.
 - b. Develop a community wealth building land use strategy for the county to influence local plans and anchor institution policy and practice relating to land use and disposal.
 - c. Review the property and asset portfolio of the County Council to inform community asset transfers.

Employment and Skills:

- 4) Implement lessons learned from the social contract programme and ensure ongoing funding.
- 5) Target Employment among the County's anchor institutions.
 - a. Encourage Oxfordshire's anchor institutions to map employment profiles.
 - b. Encourage anchor institutions to target employment opportunities towards deprived postcodes.

Social Economy:

- 6) Consider the utility of the current business support offer.
 - a. Audit business support alongside the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to better understand the appropriateness and availability of the business support offer in Oxfordshire.
 - b. Following an audit, consider additional support and available funding streams.

¹ TOMs refers to reporting standards for measuring social value: Themes, Outcomes, Measures.

Introduction

Many localities across the UK are embracing inclusive economy ambitions, aiming to surpass traditional economic development approaches that have fallen short in delivering widespread social, economic, and environmental benefits at scale.²

In some areas, this aspiration is driving a shift towards more progressive forms of local economic development, with community wealth building approaches now taking centre stage.³

[Community wealth building](#) represents a progressive approach to economic development, aiming to reshape conventional economic systems to enhance the flow and wealth and opportunity for local residents and communities. Central to this, is the mobilisation of the economic powers of large, locally-rooted entities, known as anchor institutions, which include councils, hospitals, universities, colleges and housing associations. The strategic deployment of these institutions' financial resources, employment practices, and assets such as land and property can significantly influence the prosperity and wellbeing of local communities.⁴

Oxfordshire County Council is currently exploring how local infrastructure and resources can be harnessed as key drivers of health and wellbeing through community wealth building approach.

About this Report

This report provides a framework for action, to guide Oxfordshire in implementing a range of community wealth building interventions.

We begin in chapter one by setting out the art of possible. While Oxfordshire has a set of distinct opportunities and challenges, we sketch out in broad terms how the [five principles of community with building](#) can be used to build a more inclusive local economy, where wealth and power serve local people, using examples of emerging practice from across the UK. Subsequent sections delve into the practicalities of implementing these interventions. Using a thematic approach, these sections are structured around the following headings:

- Economic development;
- Spending and procurement;
- Land and property;
- Employment and skills; and the
- Social Economy.

² TL Goodwin (2022). A new progressive economy is already being built locally. The New Statesman. [Link](#).

³ TL Goodwin et al (2022). A light in the dark: progressive frontiers in local economies. [Link](#)

⁴ CLES (2023). Briefing: Community wealth building 2023 – a guide for new councillors. [Link](#).

This framework for action draws on insights gathered through a series of consultations with local stakeholders, including local authority officers, health practitioners, and representatives from the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. Each section contains a summary of existing activities in Oxfordshire that align with community wealth building principles, as well as the obstacles that must be addressed for successful implementation. Utilising these insights, each section also contains a series of key actions that serve as a foundation for future initiatives, outlining the necessary steps to develop a robust community wealth building programme in Oxfordshire.

1. The Art of the Possible

"We have a vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. This means working closely with our residents, partners and wider communities to make Oxfordshire the very best place it can be."

[Leader's Foreword, Oxfordshire County Council Strategic Plan]

Oxfordshire: A Tale of Two Counties

Oxfordshire stands out as one of the UK's economic powerhouses, making substantial contributions to the national treasury generating an economic output of around £23 billion of Gross Value Added (GVA) each year.⁵

The County's economic dynamism is driven by research and innovation, particularly in fields such as life sciences, clean energy, and artificial intelligence. Home to the world's top-ranked university, Oxfordshire nurtures one of the best qualified populations in the country, with the highest concentration of knowledge workers.⁶ Research, innovation and science hubs are also well spread throughout the County, with Harwell Science and Innovation Campus in the Vale of White Horse,⁷ Culham Campus and South Oxfordshire.⁸

Recent achievements include attracting substantial inward investment, exemplified by Moderna's plans for a major manufacturing hub⁹ and BMW's £600 million investment in the MINI plant, which already employs over 3,400 individuals.¹⁰ Furthermore, Oxfordshire leads the UK in terms of 'good growth', with Oxford topping PwC's 2021 Good Growth for Cities report, which measures the performance of cities against key economic and wellbeing indicators, such as employment, health, income and skills.¹¹ Notably, Oxford City has maintained an unemployment rate of under 1% for a significant period, coupled with growth in private sector jobs.¹²

Despite notable economic successes, Oxfordshire grapples with significant challenges, particularly concerning income disparities, housing affordability, and health inequalities. Income inequality is stark, especially in Oxford, where a considerable portion of the population earns below the national real living wage of £9 per hour, with gender and employment status exacerbating these disparities.¹³

In education, while Oxfordshire generally outperforms the national average, disparities persist among demographic groups and localities. Disadvantaged pupils trail by 6 percentage points in

⁵ OxLEP (2018). Oxfordshire: a trailblazer for the UK economy. [Link](#).

⁶ Oxford Strategic Partnership (2024). [Link](#).

⁷ Harwell Campus. About. [Link](#).

⁸ Culham Campus. About. [Link](#).

⁹ Oxford Mail. (2023). Moderna builds new manufacturing hub in Oxfordshire. [Link](#).

¹⁰ BBC. (2023). BMW application for Cowley Mini plant changes approved. [Link](#).

¹¹ PWC (2021). Good Growth for Cities: The local economic impact of COVID-19. [Link](#).

¹² Centre for Cities (2016). Fast Growth Cities: The opportunities and challenges ahead. [Link](#).

¹³ Oxford Strategic Partnership and OxLEP. Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Initiative Summary Report Findings. [Link](#).

Early Years development and by 2.9 percentage points in attainment 8 scores at KS4.¹⁴ Additionally, the evolving economic landscape leaves a significant portion of the population unable to benefit from local prosperity gains, compounded by the dominance of Oxford University, which disproportionately benefits specific post-doctoral demographics in high-growth industries.

Housing affordability presents a critical long-term challenge, with Oxford ranking as the least affordable city in the UK. Average house prices exceed 15 times the average salary, while monthly rents are among the highest in the South East.^{15, 16} Oxford builds significantly fewer homes compared to cities with lower demand, exacerbating the housing crisis and contributing to a growing homelessness problem.¹⁷ Stark disparities persist in social housing tenancies, mortgages, and homeownership opportunities, compounded by intergenerational poverty and limited social housing availability outside Oxford.

While Oxfordshire generally experiences low levels of deprivation, specific wards like Blackbird Leys, Barton, and Sandhills face significant challenges, with above-average rates of residents living in income deprivation and experiencing prolonged periods of unemployment.^{18, 19} According to the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019, three of Blackbird Leys' four Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) rank among the 20% most deprived in England, particularly in education, skills, and training.²⁰ Additionally, IMD indicators reveal significant inequalities in Banbury – a district with some of the most deprived areas in the County – with six LSOAs ranked within the 20% most deprived areas nationally, and seven areas ranking in the 10% most deprived nationally on education and skills indicators specifically.²¹ Health indicators in the area are also notably worse than the national average, especially in terms of the prevalence of depression.²² Outside of inner-city wards, concealed pockets of deprivation persist within market towns and villages, often escaping detection by conventional measures like the IMD. Rural poverty is hidden, scattered in small pockets that sit alongside areas of wealth. Combining data from the 2021 census with the new Ethnic Group Deprivation Index (EGDI), which breaks down IMD by ethnic group, can reveal an otherwise hidden cluster of people experiencing significant economic hardship.²³

In addressing these challenges, Oxfordshire aims for prosperity across all neighbourhoods, with concerted efforts from the County Council, local districts, and anchor partners. By confronting underlying issues of inequality and deprivation, Oxfordshire strives to foster a thriving and equitable community where all residents can flourish.

¹⁴ Oxfordshire Education Commission. (2023). Time for change: improving educational opportunity for all Oxfordshire's children and young people. [Link](#).

¹⁵ Oxford City Council. Housing Statistics. Housing Affordability. [Link](#).

¹⁶ Valuation Office Agency. (2019). Private Rental Market Statistics, 'Room' monthly rents recorded between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 for the South East. [Link](#).

¹⁷ Centre for Cities. (2024). Cities Outlook 2024. [Link](#).

¹⁸ Oxfordshire County Council. (2019). Oxfordshire Insight: Deprivation. [Link](#).

¹⁹ Oxfordshire County Council. (2020). Some are more equal than others: Hidden inequalities in a prospering Oxfordshire. [Link](#).

²⁰ Oxfordshire JSNA. (2020). Blackbird Leys Settlement profile of Health and Wellbeing Evidence. [Link](#).

²¹ Oxfordshire JSNA. (2019). Banbury: Community Profile of Health and Wellbeing Evidence. [Link](#).

²² Ibid.

²³ The Guardian (2023). High-end bikes and overcrowded homes: where poverty hides in Oxford, [Link](#). Note that at the time of writing, the EGDI data is not publicly accessible.

Leading Lights

In seeking to deliver widespread prosperity for people and communities, Oxfordshire is not alone. But while, many places now aspire to have more inclusive economies, this renewed strategic purpose has, in the main, led to areas trying to squeeze more benefits for local people and places out of inward investment opportunities as well as the continued reliance on property development-led regeneration.²⁴

It remains to be seen, therefore, as to whether this will be enough to turn the dial here and have a positive impact on poverty, deprivation and inequality. Recent analysis by CLES shows that while foreign direct investment (FDI) has increased in almost all English city regions, for example,²⁵ this has not correlated with a positive impact on deprivation.²⁶

This is not to say, of course, that local economic development practitioners should not be trying to squeeze as much as they can out of inward investment. But in addition, they should also be looking to diversify their approach to produce wider social, economic and environmental benefits at scale.

To this end, some areas are starting to tread a different path.²⁷ Here community wealth building has become a much more embedded approach, with local place-based assets becoming the focus of local economic development practice. This has resulted in the adoption of the following interventions and tactics with a greater focus on the grass roots economy.

Vision and Metrics

Minimising the extraction of wealth and building prosperity for all should be the intention of local economic strategy. Local economies everywhere should now be rejecting the idea that the sole measure of economic success is growth and should be including additional metrics for wellbeing, happiness, the reduction of poverty and carbon emissions. While economic strategy and planning falls under the jurisdiction of local governments, they should unite and inspire here, encouraging and enabling other anchor institutions, communities and the VCSE sector to play a key role in establishing an inclusive local economy vision. CLES's recent work with Newcastle, to produce a new inclusive economic strategy is a key example of this approach.²⁸

Diversifying Ownership

The development of inclusive local economies also means growing more diverse forms of ownership such as co-operatives, social enterprises and community businesses. Recent research by CLES has highlighted that employee-owned businesses, for example, tend to be more resilient, less indebted, pay higher wages and more productive.²⁹ To this end, councils such as Islington

²⁴ TL Goodwin et al (2022). A light in the dark: progressive frontiers in local economies. CLES. [Link](#).

²⁵ Office for National Statistics (2021). Foreign direct investment involving UK companies by UK country and region, (directional): inward. [Link](#).

²⁶ Office for National Statistics (2019). English Indices of deprivation 2019. [Link](#).

²⁷ TL Goodwin et al (2022). A light in the dark: progressive frontiers in local economies. CLES. [Link](#).

²⁸ Newcastle City Council (2023). Newcastle Inclusive Economic Strategy: Wealth that flows to all. [Link](#).

²⁹ S Benstead and J Heneghan (2022). Owning the workplace, securing the future. CLES. [Link](#).

have diversified their business support offer by commissioning a social enterprise hub and a co-operative development agency.³⁰

With support from Power to Change, Liverpool City Region has invested £6.5m to support the development of local socially trading organisations. With this funding they have established Kindred - a new investment and development vehicle, owned and run by the sector, which is now providing business support and funding to local community businesses.³¹

In Greater Manchester, the combined authority is establishing an inclusive ownership platform to support and grow co-operative, mutual, social and community enterprises in key sectors of the everyday economy such as childcare.³²

In North of the Tyne, the combined authority has been working with a group of supply teachers and local trade unions to create a supply teacher co-operative. Owned and controlled by the teachers themselves, the co-operative will replace the prioritisation of profit with an imperative to pay fairly and provide good terms and conditions for teachers.³³

Harnessing the Power of Public Procurement

Looking for opportunities to support and influence the behaviour of local SMEs is emerging as a key local economic development tactic to promote a more inclusive local economy. As a result of Covid and the need to administer business support grants, many councils now have increased intelligence about the nature of their local SMEs.³⁴

In councils such as Fife, Luton and Carmarthenshire, they are using this intelligence to target their own procurement expenditure towards growing and diversifying their local SME base. Here, economic development officers are engaging with local SMEs to make them aware of their goods and services pipeline, with a view to more of their supply chains being delivered by these local businesses. Through this engagement these local authorities are using this as an opportunity to address the environmental crisis – supporting local SMEs with retrofit and access to environmental grants. They are also encouraging the adoption of the living wage, as well as initiating discussions around succession planning, to potentially transition to worker ownership. This enables these local businesses to grow and develop with greater social and environmental purpose.

Building Inclusive Skills and Employment Pathways

Local anchor institutions often have significant numbers of jobs with good terms and conditions that can be targeted towards people and communities who need them the most.

In the West Midlands, the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System, in partnership with the Birmingham Anchor Institution Network, is leading a programme known as ICAN across all of its employing providers. The three-year programme will deliver job opportunities for unemployed and young people, targeting economically disadvantaged areas across Birmingham and Solihull. It

³⁰ CLES (2022). Community wealth building in Islington (2018-ongoing). [Link](#).

³¹ Kindred (2021). What we do. [Link](#).

³² Greater Manchester Combined Authority (2022). Launch of the report from the Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission. [Link](#).

³³ F Jones (2022). Unions tackling wealth extraction on the front line. CLES. [Link](#).

³⁴ Local Government Association (2021). Supporting councils with business engagement. [Link](#).

includes the provision of tailor made “get into work” development and support programmes, with careers, interview, application support and a programme of post-employment mentorship. The programme launched in November 2021 and has to date delivered 239 job outcomes with a further 322 applicants either currently in, or awaiting, training.

Using Land and Property to Build Community Wealth

How land and property assets are owned and managed are key features of any local economy. A community wealth building approach here is about using public land in a more purposeful way to build affordable housing, support local business and community activity.

For example, in 2017 Salford City Council launched *Dérive*, a wholly owned council-company set up with £2m of Section 106 funds.³⁵ Working in partnership with local housing associations, *Dérive* aims to deliver high-quality, truly affordable mixed tenure homes, on Council-owned, under used sites. The homes will be sustainable and provided at below average rent. *Dérive* has an ambition to deliver 3,000 new council and community-owned homes over the next ten years, forming Salford’s largest council housing scheme for 50 years.

This approach also provides the opportunity to leverage additional social value in the form of construction training, apprenticeships and jobs that are targeted to local residents.

Furthermore, a community wealth building lens is now being applied to inform planning decisions. Through their ambitious local plan, for example, Preston City Council now requires developments that pass a size threshold to contribute to local job creation, create training and upskilling opportunities for local people and support local supply chains through procurement. Preston contracts a local social enterprise to monitor delivery, whose services are paid for by the developer.

Making Financial Power Work for Local Places

Despite the highly challenging funding environment for local government, community wealth building ambitions have, for example, seen local government pension funds used to fund local housing.³⁶

More broadly, levers such as the Public Works Loans Board have been used by councils such as Salford to purchase a local shopping centre to redevelop and revitalise one of their local town centres and support local and social businesses through favourable tenancy agreements.³⁷

Carmarthenshire council in southwest Wales have used levelling up fund monies to purchase a Debenhams and are working with their local health board to turn this into a health centre with a view to not only improving local services but also driving footfall on the local high street to help local business.³⁸

CLES have also recently worked with APSE to produce a toolkit to maximise the levelling up fund’s impact in local economies.³⁹ This toolkit, integrates five critical checks for project evaluation and

³⁵ *Dérive* Salford. (2019). *Dérive* business plan 2019/20. [Link](#).

³⁶ CLES and Preston City Council (2019). How we built community wealth in Preston: achievements and lessons. [Link](#).

³⁷ N Tague (2023). City Council is in the market. *The Big Issue*. [Link](#).

³⁸ TL Goodwin et al (2022). A light in the dark: progressive frontiers in local economies. CLES. [Link](#).

³⁹ CLES and APSE (2023). Getting the most from levelling up: A toolkit for maximising impact in local economies. [Link](#).

delivers best practice recommendations. It stands as a valuable resource for authorities, facilitating the optimisation of social, economic, and environmental outcomes from their initiatives.

Does it Work?

Determining the effectiveness of real-world interventions like community wealth building is notoriously hard. Nevertheless, recent research by the University of Liverpool, University of Central Lancashire, Lancaster University and us here at CLES, shows that community wealth building in the city of Preston, for example, is having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of its residents.

Our research found that during the period in which Preston's community wealth building programme was introduced, there were fewer mental health problems than would have been expected compared to other similar areas, as life satisfaction and economic measures improved. The introduction of the programme was associated with a 3% decline in antidepressant prescribing, and a 2% decline in the prevalence of depression, along with a 9% improvement in life satisfaction, and an 11% increase in wages, compared to expected trends. As our recent paper in the Lancet Public Health concludes, these interventions potentially provide an effective model for economic development that leads to substantial health benefits.⁴⁰ While the data does not measure demand for services specifically, it can be expected that the evidenced improvements in mental health will reduce demand for mental health and wellbeing related services.

⁴⁰ Rose, T et al. (2023). The mental health and wellbeing impact of a Community Wealth Building programme in England: a difference-in-differences study. The Lancet Public Health. [Link](#).

2. Economic Development

Progress to Date

Economic development practice across Oxfordshire has strong roots in inclusive economy principles. The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economic Partnership (OIEP) has convened over a hundred organisations county-wide, spanning employers, businesses, educational institutions, community groups, and local government, to tackle pressing challenges collectively.

Notably, the development of the **Inclusive Economy Charter** promotes action through pledges that organisations sign up to, recognising the importance of supporting an inclusive economy across Oxfordshire. Over 50 organisations have signed or are in the process of signing the Charter. These signatories have made approximately 600 pledges, covering actions addressing social issues and supporting community development, including the transfer of unused apprenticeship levy, employee volunteering for community projects, mentoring, and more.⁴¹

To further the mission outlined in the Charter, the OIEP has established a number of **action-focused groups** to drive inclusive economic growth. The action groups have made progress in advancing the goals outlined in the OIEP's Delivery Plan 2023-24. For example, they have actively assessed funding opportunities for educational programmes like ARCh (Assisted Reading for Children) and pursued funding for a social value brokerage system for local authorities to maximise the impact of economic activities within the community.⁴²

Squeezing More Juice from Inward Investment

In redefining Oxfordshire's approach to inward investment, stakeholders emphasised the imperative for more strategic measures. While acknowledging successes like Moderna's job creation, there's a resounding call to extend the benefits beyond GVA. Embracing disruptive approaches, such as leveraging local plans, holds the potential to significantly enhance inclusive economic development, ensuring that prosperity reaches all corners of the community.

"Oxford, in particular, is a global brand which attracts investment, contributing to wealth creation. Take Moderna, for example, which has created 300 jobs, primarily low-entry level manufacturing roles. While we recognise and embrace our global brand, there's an opportunity for more disruptive approaches, such as leveraging local plans to enhance inclusive economic development."

The alignment of investments with broader social and environmental goals emerges as a central theme, particularly in addressing the needs of deprived communities, especially those situated in market towns; thereby ensuring that economic endeavours not only generate financial returns but also contribute positively to the wellbeing of residents and the environment.

⁴¹ Future Oxfordshire Partnership. Inclusive Economy Charter. [Link](#).

⁴² Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, Annual Report, 2022-23. [Link](#).

“There could be more conditions for investors, e.g., around pathways to employment for disadvantaged local communities. There are conversations to be had around the alignment of these investors ESG aspirations, and the County Council’s inclusive economy aspirations, and what we want as part of that.”

Nevertheless, despite optimism in the finance and investment landscape, particularly due to the *“scale of positive investors and prevalence of anchor institutions, who express an interest in social investment”*, concerns persist regarding the alignment of local investment with local needs and the available mechanisms to drive it.

Moreover, stakeholders highlighted the importance of capitalising on alternative resources available to the County for fostering economic development, recognising the limitations of relying solely on inward investment. In this context, there is significant interest in exploring the potential of the Shared Prosperity Fund to complement existing investment efforts. However, challenges exist in coordinating the utilisation of these funds effectively, underscoring the importance of aligning fund allocation with local economic strategies and priorities.

“We recognise the need for place-based interventions, but face challenges in implementing them due to lack of political focus at local level.”

With the transfer of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) functions to the County Council, stakeholders see a critical opportunity to synchronise efforts, ensuring the fulfilment of commitments and propelling Oxfordshire toward a more inclusive and prosperous economic future. This transition presents a unique moment to align functions and resources, leveraging collective strengths to address existing challenges and seize emerging opportunities for growth and development across the County.

Summary

Inclusive economic development in Oxfordshire has strong foundations. However, progressive practice could go further. In summary, stakeholders advocated for a more strategic and inclusive approach to inward investment, aligning economic development efforts with community wealth-building principles. By taking action to prioritise social progress alongside financial gains, Oxfordshire can lead the way in raising the ambition of investors to support greater local economic inclusion.

Key Actions

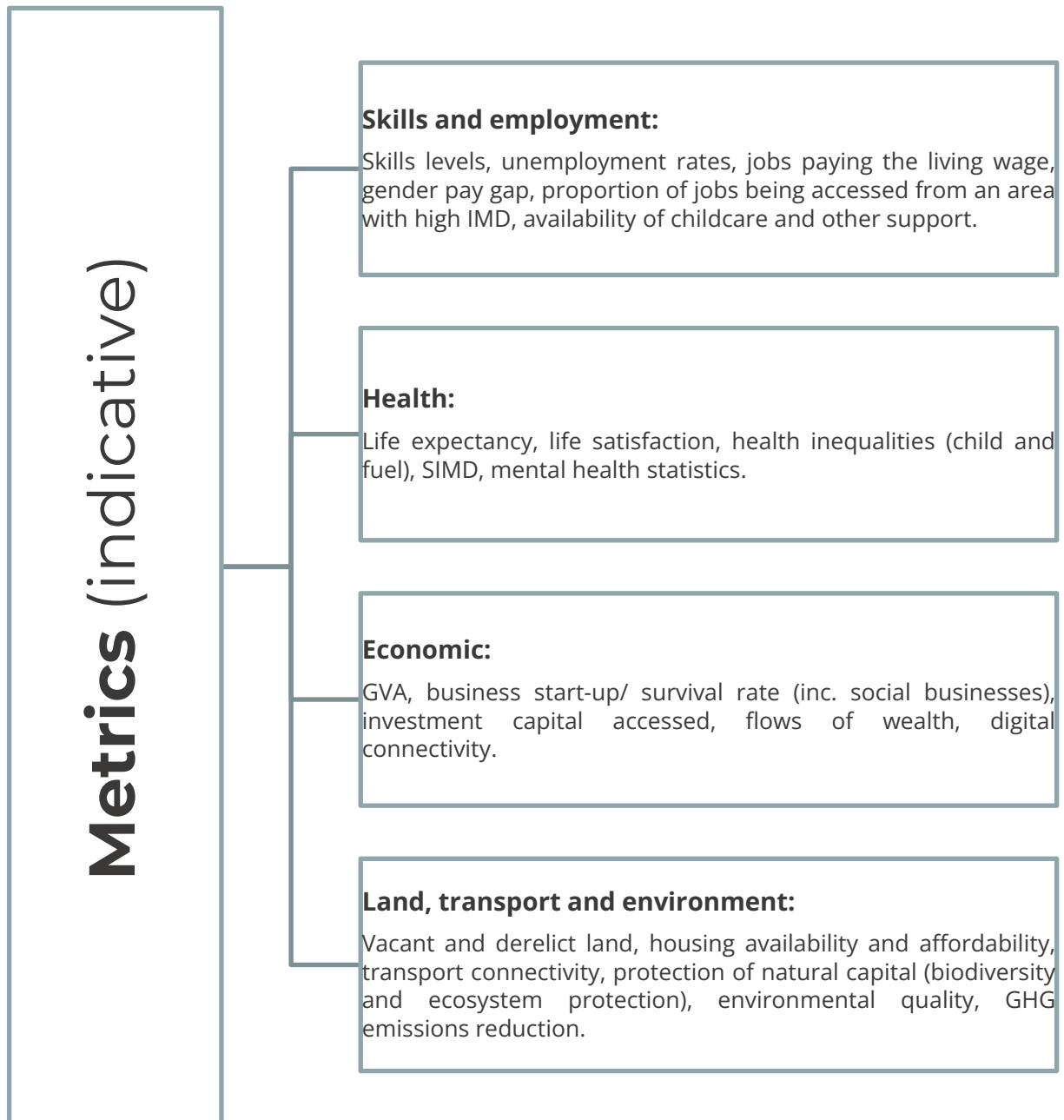
- 1. Prioritise Community Wealth Building in Economic Development Practice:** With the LEP functions transferring to the County Council, bringing business data and institutional knowledge, there is an opportunity to build a new economic development function in the council. The County’s Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) looked to advance community wealth building principles and ensure that economic growth is sustainable and retained locally. With a view to advancing these ambitions, there should be an even greater imperative going forward to grow and develop the economy from within and to get more wealth to circulate locally. This can be done by committing to the following actions:
 - a) Establish a vision for progressive local economic development:** Building on the activity to date, community wealth building should be the central narrative which underlies all activity going forward. Supporting the growth and development

of local SMEs, as well as other forms of socially trading business and promoting employment and skills opportunities across Oxfordshire should be prioritised, as per the key actions in the subsequent sections. When it comes to inward investment, Oxfordshire should be bold here. Oxfordshire is an attractive place to invest, and the Council should seek secure maximum benefit by aligning its community wealth building principles with investors' ESG goals. This should include an ask for investors to support employment pathways for people and communities from specific areas of high deprivation and support local supply chains within those areas.

b) Capture impact through a broad set of metrics: Capturing impact through a broad set of metrics is also important and there is a real opportunity for the County to look beyond traditional measures such as GVA and include the kinds of equality and health outcomes that it wants the local economy to generate. A recent report to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) proposes that today's primary goals should be environmental sustainability, falling inequality, rising wellbeing (including, but not only, incomes) and strengthening resilience. Adapting and adding to these measures, we propose a broad set of metrics below. (See Figure 1).

c) Ensure officer capacity to deliver economic development practices informed by the five community wealth building principles: Following the transfer of LEP functions, the Council should ensure that there is capacity for officers with a corporate function to deliver strategic economic development practice with a focus on community wealth building. Officers with this capacity should sit across council functions from procurement, property and assets, planning, employment, and finance.

Figure 1. Measuring Impact, CLES



2. Spending and Procurement

Progress to Date

In the ongoing journey to enhance collaboration and maximise the impact of public expenditure, Oxfordshire's procurement landscape is undergoing transformation, with emerging good practices reflecting a commitment to social value and community wellbeing.

Emerging Good Practice

This is evident in the implementation of **the County Council's Social Value Policy** which **looks beyond the cost of goods and services** and considers the broader aspects of how public spend can enhance economic, social, and environmental wellbeing. Functioning as a "golden thread", the policy is integrated with the council's Strategic Economic Plan, Climate Action Framework, and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework. The current priorities and expected outcomes of the policy include the creation of job opportunities for military and care leavers, addressing pay gaps, and supporting local community assets. Consultation stakeholders highlighted that the current Social Value Policy has delivered £1.9 million in social value benefits in its first year.

Furthermore, within the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP), there is a concerted effort to evaluate the importance of social value beyond compliance as stakeholders explained:

"Social value should not be viewed as a mere obligation but embraced as a positive force for societal benefit."

"The chief executives of local authorities and anchor institutions in Oxfordshire are enthusiastic about the anchor network's potential for shared learning, but also for challenging each other and holding each other's feet to the fire in terms of commitments and accountability."

The enthusiasm among chief executives of local authorities and anchor institutions in leveraging the anchor network for shared learning and mutual accountability is palpable. Initiatives like the **social planning procurement working group** at the OIEP are exploring strategies to leverage the considerable impact of the County's vibrant university business spin-offs, numbering around 200—the highest rate in the country. The overarching goal is to shape the business behaviour of these entities, encouraging them to adopt more inclusive practices, such as hiring individuals from areas facing socioeconomic disadvantages.

Additionally, Oxfordshire's anchor institutions stand ready with **growing ambitions to mobilise their spend towards supporting progressive local economic development through localising their supply chains**. For example, anchors across the County are eager to learn from existing practice, [such as Oxford Colleges' local food procurement](#), which enabled local SME food suppliers to access procurement opportunities through a simplified and standardised system. This has provided opportunities for local SMEs to grow with confidence.

While the concept of social value is not universally ingrained in the mindset of local providers, the **OIEP has created a platform aimed at fostering awareness and educating the market**.

Stakeholders suggested that this work could be supported through pre-market events engaging SMEs and VCSE organisations to boost confidence and dispel misconceptions about social value.

From a healthcare expenditure standpoint, representatives of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) have also indicated a strategic shift. The **ICB is starting to move away from competitive tendering**, while aiming **to increase spend with VCSE organisations**. It is now considering a reduced number of contracts, characterised by larger scope and duration. While it was accepted that this approach may pose challenges for smaller, often local organisations, it presents significant opportunities for collaboration, partnerships, or subcontracting with lead providers who secure the contracts.

Despite these promising developments, challenges persist within Oxfordshire's procurement landscape.

A Fragmented Landscape

Consultations unveiled a fragmented procurement landscape, characterised by *"a two-tiered system"* and lack of formal collaboration structures, particularly between the County and District Councils. While *"informal monthly meetings exist for knowledge sharing, a formalised structure is lacking, and colleagues do not consistently work together on projects"*, leading to missed opportunities for synergies.

Recognising the inherent challenges posed by a *"siloed procurement landscape"*, ongoing efforts are being made to foster a more cohesive and collaborative approach. Central to this endeavour is the establishment of the OIEP's social value and procurement group, which aims to maximise the impact of economic activities by encouraging businesses to invest in local communities through job creation, training programmes, and environmental initiatives. This is strategically framed to intervene in ways that promise *"long-term financial benefits"* as well as benefits relating to population health and wellbeing.

Application of The Social Value Portal TOMs

Moreover, concerns were raised about the effectiveness of existing frameworks, such as the Social Value Portal TOMs (themes, outcomes and measures), in adequately capturing the value of diverse ownership models. Stakeholders stressed the need for a more *"tailored approach which extends beyond TOMs,"* to incorporate additional narratives relevant to community voices and wealth building. This holistic assessment of social value could be achieved by leveraging tools like case studies to *"demonstrate impact beyond quantifiable metrics."* Stakeholders also advocate for establishing a repository of social value impact measures using examples of successful projects and outcomes, which could serve as proactive narratives.

Disagreement About Social Value Weighting Targets

Disagreement about social value weighting targets emerged during consultations, particularly regarding proposals to increase these weightings. Currently, tenders above £100,000 but below public procurement thresholds apply a minimum social value weighting of 12%, while those above thresholds apply a minimum of 16%.⁴³

⁴³ Public Sector Executive (2022). 'Oxfordshire County Council's new social value policy'. By Cllr Calum Miller. [Link](#).

Some stakeholders cited advice from the Social Value Portal, emphasising the importance of balancing social value with financial cost, cautioning against excessive weightings. They expressed concerns about allowing the pursuit of social value to overshadow the primary objective of achieving value for money in procurement processes, using the metaphor *"not letting the tail wag the dog."*

However, research from CLES suggests that higher social value weightings, such as 20%, can effectively transform the nature of the commercial economy and offer benefits, particularly in contexts of economic recovery. This presents a nuanced discussion about finding the optimal balance between social value and financial considerations within procurement practices.⁴⁴

Support for the VCSE Sector

Stakeholders highlighted the challenges faced by social economy organisations, particularly small businesses, in accessing public procurement opportunities. Issues such as poor reviews and late payments from anchor institutions were cited as significant barriers to the growth and sustainability of these enterprises. Concerns were raised about the adverse impact of delayed payments, especially for smaller organisations reliant on timely funds to sustain their operations. As one stakeholder noted:

"I think every single provider will agree that we need to be timelier when it comes to payments for smaller organisations, especially where there is a direct contract, we need to take their concerns more seriously, as it can result for some real tricky times for the smaller organisation."

Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach. Leveraging the expertise and resources of anchor institutions, alongside exploring innovative financing mechanisms, were identified as crucial strategies to provide much-needed support for early-stage social enterprises. Additionally, streamlining procurement processes and prioritising timely payments were deemed essential steps to enhance opportunities for small businesses within the social economy sector.

Moreover, stakeholders emphasised the importance of creating a level playing field for the VCSE sector in procurement. This involves making procurement proportionate and accessible based on the size and complexity of the tender. Additionally, there is a call for more social licensing⁴⁵ to ensure that social and ethical considerations take precedence in procurement decisions.

Summary

Oxfordshire's procurement landscape is evolving to prioritise social value and community impact. Promising initiatives such as the Social Value Policy, OIEP collaborations, and shifts in healthcare procurement practices reflect a commitment to fostering inclusive economic development. However, challenges related to fragmentation, framework effectiveness, and support for the VCSE sector remain. Addressing these challenges will require ongoing collaboration, innovative solutions, and a steadfast commitment to maximising social value for the benefit of all residents.

⁴⁴ Burch, D. (2021). Powering Social Value Through Recovery. [Link](#).

⁴⁵ Social Licensing involves restricting supply chains to suppliers that meet certain criteria or a social/ethical threshold.

Key Actions

2) Leverage Procurement for Community Wealth Building in Oxfordshire:

Local demand for goods and services in the public sector can be a key driver of a progressive local economic development, supporting the growth and development of local businesses and circulate wealth more equitably. After a year of reporting, OCC procurement has delivered nearly £2.3million in social value benefits and there was a shared feeling among stakeholders that this could be even greater in number. In this, the County Council could use both its convening power and its understanding of the macro picture of the local economy to negotiate and set strategic priorities on a county scale. This role would require leaning into the use of data to identify how influenceable spend could be more locally targeted. First steps for this process include:

- a. Ensure procurement leads are supported to incorporate community wealth building approaches into practice:** As highlighted by the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, there is a lot of emerging practice that sets out to advance the aims and objectives of community wealth building. Procurement leads should be supported through training in best practice and closer working relationships with officers focussed on delivering community wealth building practice. As the Social Value Act embeds, it is important to for procurement leads and teams are aware of best practice and are able explore the legal provisions that enable procurement practice to support community wealth building, such as through tools like lotting contracts, social licensing to restrict participation in public tendering processes or the use of pre-qualification questionnaires.⁴⁶
- b. Analysing collective levels of local authority and anchor spend in Oxfordshire:** With leadership from the County Council, procurement leads within the County, districts and anchor partners should be encouraged to analyse their procurement data and identify their influenceable spend – in other words money that is currently being spent on goods and services that could in theory be spent with alternative local and more socially productive suppliers, such as triple bottom line SMEs and social enterprises. This would allow for a county-wide understanding of local authority and anchor spend and pave the ground for interventions to increase spending with alternative supply chains. The community wealth building progressive procurement baseline survey is a tool that can be used to better understand procurement practices across Oxfordshire.⁴⁷ By circulating and analysing annually, this could be a baseline that the County Council, anchor institution partners and local authorities can use to strengthen their progressive procurement agendas, identifying any gaps and how they can be addressed.
- c. Support the development of locally relevant TOMs:** OCC collaborates with the Social Value Portal, utilising the national TOMs framework. However,

⁴⁶ CLES (2020). Restoring public values: the role of public procurement. [Link](#).

⁴⁷ A spend analysis methodology can be found at: CLES: Making Spend Matter. [Link](#).

challenges within the TOMs framework have been identified in the consultation process, particularly for the VCSE sector and SMEs. There was a proposal raised for a new tailored framework to measure social value, which goes beyond national TOMs to capture the value added to the local economy and the concept of plural ownership, recognising the greater value that generative business forms capture for the local economy. This should be revisited, supported, and used by the County.

- d. **Engage potential suppliers:** Greater engagement with potential suppliers to foster confidence and dispel misconceptions about social value, consultation stakeholders also suggested hosting events at the pre-market stage of the procurement process, engaging SMEs and VCSE organisations in particular. One noted that *“the overarching sentiment is that social value should transcend being merely an obligation; rather, it should be embraced as a positive force for societal benefit”*. As per the examples of emerging practice in section 2, this could also involve economic development officers engaging with local SMEs to make them aware of the goods and services pipeline, with a view to more of their supply chains being delivered by these local businesses. This could also be an opportunity to encourage the adoption of the living wage, as well as initiating discussions around succession planning, to potentially transition to worker ownership if business owners are reaching retirement age. The employee ownership sector has doubled since 2020,⁴⁸ and the Employee Ownership Association provides materials that could be used by councils to support the transition of local businesses.

⁴⁸ Employee Ownership Association: What the Evidence Tells Us. [Link](#).

3. Land and Property

Progress to Date

There are a number of activities already in motion that are leveraging land and property to drive forward progressive economic development practice.

Our consultations illuminated various perspectives on the future use of land in the County, spanning from housing and employment to infrastructure, community use, green space, nature recovery, and renewable energy. Suggestions range from specific site proposals to broader ideas and opportunities. There was expressed support for sustainable and inclusive development, emphasising accessibility via public transport, and amenities within walking or cycling distance. Additionally, stakeholders highlighted the importance of environmentally friendly building methods and technologies that contribute to net-zero emissions and resilient infrastructure.

Active Community Land Trusts (CLTs)

Currently, the VCSE sector is driving active CLTs, empowering communities to take control of assets. These organisations are engaging in various projects aimed at identifying publicly owned brownfield sites and constructing permanently affordable housing across the County, with support from Oxford City Council. Notably, there are ongoing initiatives at Crofts Court and Blackbird Leys, areas characterised by relatively high levels of multiple deprivation. As a result of these efforts, from eight affordable homes for rent have been fully developed in a high-value area suffering from a severe shortage of affordable housing.⁴⁹

Affordable Workspace for Local Business

“A lot of businesses say that access to space is a real challenge... there is a need for the County Council and its anchors to do more to provide space.”

The limited availability of employment space in Oxfordshire has presented significant challenges for local businesses striving to meet their operational needs and growth aspirations⁵⁰. Recognising this issue, OxLEP has played a pivotal role in supporting the development of affordable workspace for local socially trading businesses. In 2022, the announcement of the opening of 'Community Works' marked a significant milestone in this endeavour.⁵¹ This initiative utilises underutilised sites with the aim of revitalising the local economy and fostering more inclusive and resilient local communities.⁵²

Community Asset Transfers (CAT)

As part of the County Council's efforts to foster thriving communities, groups are increasingly empowered to occupy, manage, and take ownership of shared assets in their localities, thereby

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ OxLEP. (2023). Strategic Economic Plan 2023-33. [Link](#).

⁵¹ OxLEP News: Oxford community workspace officially opens as new spaces are secured through OxLEP-backed 'Meanwhile in Oxfordshire' programme. [Link](#).

⁵² Ibid.

supporting regeneration efforts. Since 2011, over 80 buildings have been transferred to community and voluntary groups at community rent rates, reflecting a commitment to grassroots initiatives and community-driven development.⁵³

"The council is empowering groups to take ownership of unused buildings in their locality and support regeneration in their respective areas."

The existing CAT policy, introduced in 2012 and revised in 2016 and further amended in 2019 and revised in 2023, stipulates that all transfers are *"limited to a use which is for the benefit of the local community,"* thereby preventing the transfer of assets to organisations that may seek to extract wealth from the community through rents or other means. However, stakeholders in our consultations noted a concerning trend:

"A lot of community groups have hit financial difficulty and can't invest in the building they have acquired through CAT and have to return the building to the council; this doesn't benefit the community."

Furthermore, stakeholders maintained that *"the topic of asset transfer, particularly within local authorities, is often not well understood, leading to challenges in its effective implementation."* To address this knowledge gap and promote greater understanding and collaboration, stakeholders suggested a roundtable event focused specifically on CAT policies. The primary objective would be to facilitate discussions, share insights and experiences, and collectively explore strategies to enhance the effectiveness of asset transfer initiatives.

Stakeholders also emphasised the need for the County Council to offer further support by providing advice and acting as a conduit, connecting community and voluntary groups with bespoke business support and sources of finance to alleviate the financial burden of maintaining assets.

"The County Council could take a more strategic role where these assets are mobilised towards social economy aims."

Additionally, there was interest in enhancing the existing policy to require asset-purchasing groups to demonstrate community benefit through the introduction of an additionality criteria. This could include, for example, requiring organisations to submit business registration and organisational proposals outlining their contributions to local inclusive employment or affordable housing initiatives.

Non-Alignment on Local Plans

Recognising the necessity for a more coordinated approach, OxLEP has played a pivotal role in supporting projects like Make Space Oxford, securing funding, and contributing to Oxfordshire's social and economic objectives. However, challenges persist due to the split of planning, economic, social and community functions across authorities within the geography. As district councils develop their local plans, a district-first approach necessarily prevails, driven by housing complexities arising from boundaries and pressures. Breaking this cycle of economic growth and

⁵³ Oxfordshire County Council: Community Assets. [Link](#).

housing pressures becomes a central challenge, underscoring the need for cohesive, strategic planning, and collaboration among local authorities.

Throughout our consultations, there was a recognition that local planning systems can facilitate the progressive use of land and assets by placing conditions on private developers to contribute to community wealth-building objectives. This could entail section 106 requirements to contribute to local employment and skills or obligations for developers to support local supply chains. Stakeholders noted a growing recognition and appetite among private developers to align with local economic priorities, integrating these considerations into their ESG goals beyond profit-driven motives:

“Increasingly within the private sector world, non-financial metrics are beginning to be more prominent.”

However, this acknowledgment comes with the caveat that local planning remains the statutory function of district councils, which, thus far, operate in different directions. Stakeholders highlighted that within local plan development, district councils primarily focus on housing development, driven by requirements of the national planning framework, with the risk of social and community infrastructure being under prioritised. Therefore, there is an appetite for the County Council, with its statutory Public Health and Social Care function and its new economic planning role, to act as an advocate and convener, working with districts to align their objectives within the broader local plans, ensuring a more holistic and inclusive approach to development.

Summary

Consultations on land and property use in Oxfordshire reveal a multifaceted approach focused on economic development and community wellbeing. While initiatives like Community Land Trusts (CLTs) and 'Community Works' have made strides in addressing affordable housing shortages and providing affordable workspace for local businesses, there remains room for expansion to maximise their impact. One notable challenge is the need for greater financial incentives and resources to support these initiatives effectively. Additionally, Community Asset Transfers (CAT) face hurdles that necessitate improved support mechanisms to facilitate their success. The absence of a unified local plan further complicates strategic planning efforts, although there is potential for private developers to align with local priorities. To address these issues, greater coordination among stakeholders and local authorities is imperative to ensure that land use serves collective goals effectively.

Key Actions

- 3) Deepen the progressive land use and disposal across the Oxfordshire footprint:** In terms of land and property disposal, this is about viewing these assets as more than just a commodity. The consultations raised the issue of lack of access to affordable space as a barrier for socially trading organisations and stakeholders suggested that the council and other anchor organisations could support them, by using underused spaces.
 - a. Use surplus public land to support affordable housing and business space:** Despite the pressure to sell-off surplus assets to maximise financial return, the County Council could take lead in encouraging all anchor partners

to consider whether any surplus land and property could in the first instance be used to support the development of affordable housing or the provision of affordable business space. As per the example in section 2, the Council could consider the feasibility of establishing a wholly owned council-company to build more affordable housing.

- b. Develop a community wealth building land use strategy for the county to influence local plans and anchor institution policy and practice relating to land use and disposal:** The upcoming refresh of the district local plans provides an opportunity to incorporate community wealth building principles into land development. While local planning takes a “district first” approach on Oxfordshire, there can be a role for the County to influence local plans and land use practice through the development of a community wealth building land use strategy. This strategy can identify the gaps in progressive land and property use while advocating for community wealth building approaches to be taken across political and institutional boundaries.

Within this strategy, the County Council could also utilise the expertise and institutional knowledge of the LEP to provide data, ensuring that progressive approaches to planning, such as utilising S106 to drive local employment or affordable housing and workspace, is supported by economic evidence.

- c. Review the property and asset portfolio of the County Council to inform community asset transfers:** The County Council currently has their own community asset transfer policy which has seen over 80 assets transferred into community use. Stakeholders throughout the consultations have suggested that this policy could be adapted to include additional criteria that aims to ensure assets are being transferred to organisations that are supporting progressive local economic development. This is particularly important at a time when Westminster are loosening budget rules for councils, to be able to dispose of assets in order to fund front-line services. However, much of the property and assets held by the Council are deemed not appropriate for transfer and the policy remains under-utilised. Therefore, the County Council should conduct a review of properties and assets available for transfer alongside the VCSE sector to assess the property needs of the local social economy organisations and SMEs.

Furthermore, once any asset is in the process of transfer, the County could act as a conduit to connect organisations who are taking the asset with the business support required to bring the asset into use and avoid financial stress.

4. Employment and Skills

Progress to Date

“Oxfordshire is dedicated to inclusive recruitment. However, there are resource challenges. While outreach initiatives for apprenticeships are underway, there is a lack of specific targeting for populations... the current approach is more general.”

Oxfordshire is committed to inclusive recruitment, although challenges persist due to resource constraints. While outreach initiatives are underway, there's a need for more targeted approaches to reach specific populations. Consultations underscored the importance of aligning recruitment processes with inclusive employment goals, highlighting the necessity for a more coordinated and collaborative approach to enhance economic inclusivity across the County.

Anchor Institution Commitments

Our consultations revealed several positive initiatives, reflecting a collective commitment to fostering inclusivity through fair employment and targeted recruitment. **The Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH) stands out in this regard, engaging with the local community and refining recruitment and employment practices.** A crucial aspect of this exploration revolves around aligning recruitment practices with the commitment to building a diverse and inclusive workforce. As an anchor institution with extensive local and national connections, OUH has a unique opportunity to lead and influence the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) agenda. The trust aims to benchmark itself against peers, emphasising inclusive practices and prioritising outcomes such as being recognised as an inclusive employer and care provider. OUH's commitment to EDI is evident through the implementation of key standards, including the Workforce Race Equality Standard (WRES), Workforce Disability Equality Standard (WDES), and Gender Pay Gap (GPG) reporting. These standards, along with annual reports and action plans, underscore OUH's commitment to transparency and accountability in creating a more inclusive workplace. Positive steps have been taken in recruitment for disabled individuals, including the piloting of easy-read job applications and supported traineeships. Additionally, improvements in the recruitment process aim to mitigate bias, with requirements for a minimum number of short listers and standardised job application structures. These initiatives reflect a deliberate effort to create an environment that attracts and retains a diverse range of talent. Despite the progress, OUH acknowledges the ongoing nature of this transformation, *“recognising challenges posed by the organisation's size, traditional mindset, and established structures.”* This acknowledgment reflects OUH's commitment to continuous improvement and understanding the need for sustained efforts to achieve lasting change.

Pre-Employment Support Provision

Another notable initiative is the 'Social Contract Programme', launched in 2022 and funded by the government's Contain Outbreak Management Fund via Oxfordshire County Council. This programme, provisionally set to continue until August 1, 2024, with a budget of £1.7 million, addresses the needs of Oxfordshire communities most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. It aims to mitigate the impacts on health and wellbeing related to unemployment or barriers to

employment, education, and training. A crucial element of the programme is the emphasis on access to quality employment supported by appropriate skills and training opportunities, recognising their role in enhancing health and wellbeing outcomes for individuals and families. Key focuses include raising awareness of Apprenticeship Levy underspend in Oxfordshire, creating a pipeline of Levy payers and SME's ready to benefit from pledged funding, and promoting initiatives like the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Grant Scheme and the Oxfordshire Apprenticeship Awards.

The collaboration between Oxford Hub and Activate Learning, has given rise to the Parent Power programme. Centred on fostering parent wellbeing and support networks, the programme envisions a community where parents and their children thrive together. By emphasising three key outcomes—ensuring good emotional wellbeing and health for parents, cultivating strong community support networks, and fostering better relationships with schools—Parent Power aims to create positive ripple effects for children. The programme offers practical learning sessions, including English classes, theory test support groups, and school readiness sessions, providing spaces for skill development and community connection. Additionally, Parent Power provides leadership development opportunities, empowering parents to contribute actively to broader strategies and policies, including the redesign of the Early Help Strategy at Oxfordshire County Council. As Parent Power evolves into its second version, a key focus is on reintroducing parents and adults to training through activities such as one-day training courses. This approach is designed to boost confidence and encourage participants to explore higher-quality job opportunities, aligning with the overarching goal of empowering parents through continuous learning.

This infrastructure and experience mean that Oxfordshire is well placed to support individuals within communities of need. However, amidst these positive actions, challenges persist. As one stakeholder put it:

"We need a different recruitment approach by removing barriers, inviting people for a chat, and adopting a more personalised strategy that considers the perspectives and environments of individuals."

During consultations, a stakeholder with prior experience managing an employment support programme at the Oxford City Council highlighted the specific challenges faced by single mothers with children who have never worked. This underscored the importance of providing tailored support and flexibility. They advocated for prioritising initiatives like job fairs in community centres to address the unique needs of this demographic. This approach aims for a double win by becoming more targeted and offering bespoke support directly in communities.

Meeting Employment Demand

Addressing employment demand remains a critical challenge in Oxfordshire, despite existing programmes aimed at supporting employability skills. One stakeholder highlighted that *"out of roughly 9,700 Universal Credit claimants across the County, 6,500 are considered the hardest to reach and furthest from the labour market."* Despite ongoing interventions, this number has shown no significant improvement.

The social care sector in Oxfordshire presents its own set of challenges, being the largest element of capital expenditure. The sector comprises a mix of numerous small enterprises, including

around 150 providers for homecare and 170 care homes in the county. However, *“despite this diversity, the sector faces significant employment challenges, marked by substantial vacancies.”*

Recruitment difficulties at the local level have necessitated active overseas recruitment, highlighting the need to attract local talent to meet the demands of the sector. The complexity of the social care landscape adds pressure to ensure timely access to appropriate care, further exacerbating recruitment challenges. Limited funding remains a significant barrier, particularly in offering competitive wages in the social care sector.

Summary

In summary, stakeholders have identified significant anchor institution vacancies in Oxfordshire, highlighting opportunities for collaboration with the County Council to promote diverse and inclusive recruitment strategies. Leveraging existing initiatives and the HR network led by the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, a coordinated effort is recommended.

Key steps include mapping employment profiles, auditing support interventions, and designing targeted pathways for those facing barriers. Exploring resources like the Shared Prosperity Fund, as seen in Fife Council's success, could further enhance employment programmes. These actions aim to create a more inclusive workforce and ensure opportunities for all community members.

Key Actions

- 4) Implement lessons learned from the social contract programme and ensure ongoing funding.** The County Council should explore what is to replace the social contract programme once it ends in December 2024. This could include pre-employment support delivered through the social contract programme, ending at the end of 2024, and further supported by existing HR network. Beyond the social contract programme's end, further support could be delivered by VCSE organisations, like Aspire with further funding sought through the ICB, with a particular focus on recruitment into the NHS as a remedy to economic determinants of health. Additional funding could also be sought from round three of the Shared Prosperity Fund. Consideration should be given to the extent to which pre-employment support is directly linked to employment demand within the County's anchor institutions – linked to recommendation five below.
- 5) Target Employment among the County's anchor institutions:** Emulating a scheme like ICan, the County could utilise their convening power, to encourage anchors to direct their employment opportunities towards under-served communities based within their locality, drawing on the employment support interventions that are currently on offer and potentially looking to commission new support if needed. Based on our consultations, both the NHS and Universities could be potential partners here. Given the challenges around fulfilling roles within social care, the Council could also look to engage social care providers in this process. An ICAN based model could be based on the following actions:
 - a. Encourage Oxfordshire's anchor institutions to map employment profiles:** Use this exercise to identify any deprived postcodes where

anchors are employing relatively few people. While the OIEP have identified target groups, the Community Research Network could be used to help locate the communities in need of anchor institution employment.

- b. Identify a series of suitable job roles and link this to pre-employment support.** Depending on the findings, additional employment support may be required. **Further action to target employment could include:**
 - i.** Examining recruitment practices and job specifications to maximise accessibility for target groups.
 - ii.** Advertising all anchor institution vacancies on a single portal, with entry level administration person specifications aligned.
 - iii.** Outreach work whereby the County Council and anchor partners work with the VCSE sector on the ground to target existing vacancies towards specific communities.

5. Social Economy

Progress to Date

In Oxfordshire, concerted efforts are underway to cultivate a vibrant social economy, marked by collaborative initiatives and innovative partnerships.

The diverse network of Community Action Groups (CAGs) exemplifies grassroots activism in action, with over 100 groups mobilising communities to address a wide range of issues, from waste management to digital inclusion. Through initiatives like Libraries of Things and Repair Cafés, these groups promote resourcefulness, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion, enriching the fabric of community life.

District councils for example, have proactively aligned with third-sector organisations, offering essential services such as cooperative development support, training programmes, and peer mentoring.

Kellogg College at **Oxford University hosts the Oxford Centre for Mutual and Co-owned Business (MCOB)**, responding to the growing significance of mutual and co-owned sectors in the UK and global economy. Supported by organisations like Mutuo and the Employee Ownership Association, MCOB is dedicated to leading research, offering professional development programmes, and facilitating cross-sectoral dialogue to advance the understanding and practice of ethical, community-centric business models within and beyond Oxford.

Additionally, **'Owned by Oxford'** is leading efforts to **establish a community-led economy within the City**. This partnership of grassroots community enterprises and infrastructure projects collaborates with larger anchor institutions to innovate new ideas and identify opportunities for supporting local social trading businesses through procurement.

The **Community Recovery Network (CRN)**, established in 2023, **plays a pivotal role in forging alliances between the VCSE sector and local communities to develop nature-centric recovery strategies, particularly in high-deprivation areas**. This initiative aims to build resilience, enhance social cohesion, and promote sustainable development practices prioritising the wellbeing of all residents. Through direct funding and capacity-building efforts, the CRN supports the development of local nature recovery strategies, emphasising public involvement, especially from seldom-heard voices in deprived communities. It is adept at nurturing early-stage ideas and collaborating with communities to bring them to fruition.

Challenges and Opportunities in Advancing Oxfordshire's Social Economy

Despite notable progress, Oxfordshire's social economy faces persistent challenges. Consultations revealed the need for more tailored business support specifically designed to meet the unique needs of the VCSE sector:

"The LEP operates a growth hub and a business support team, and we've collaborated with them to secure funds for the VCSE sector, particularly social enterprises, over several years. However, it's worth

noting that while the LEP aims to cover a broad spectrum, the VCSE sector benefits from specialised expertise from organisations like Owned by Oxford, Aspire, and Cooperative Futures. These organisations are more localised and can provide robust support. While we seek additional support, it's crucial that it is distinct from mainstream business assistance."

Collaborations with localised organisations such as Owned by Oxford, Aspire, and Cooperative Futures have proven beneficial, offering specialised expertise and tailored support. However, consultations highlighted the necessity for meaningful engagement with the VCSE sector beyond mere lip service:

"When it comes to supporting businesses, it's crucial to partner with local organisations deeply connected to the communities we aim to help. Many in disadvantaged communities might not know about available support or face challenges in accessing it. We've been exploring funding business development roles in community organisations, like community banks, offering a flexible approach."

Consultations have revealed fatigue within the VCSE sector and communities due to constant engagement without meaningful outcomes. To mitigate this, it's essential for anchor institutions to avoid duplicating efforts in community engagement and utilise existing networks such as the Community Research Network for engagement with VCSE sector professionals and residents directly:

"Mechanisms like the Community Research Network, involving relevant communities and VCSE sector representatives, exist for this purpose. Utilising these existing networks is essential to avoid overwhelming the VCSE sector and to make coordinated and joined-up efforts, ensuring our requests to both them and the community are sensible."

Moreover, the absence of sufficient early-stage capital for emerging social economy businesses poses a significant challenge. Stakeholders have proposed the exploration of creating a community-controlled investment fund, similar to the successful model of Kindred in Liverpool (as outlined in section 2), to overcome this shortfall. In this endeavour, anchor institutions are seen as instrumental in both seeding and supporting the establishment of such a fund, ensuring its effectiveness and sustainability. This collaborative effort would not only address the pressing need for financial resources but also foster innovation and growth within Oxfordshire's social economy ecosystem.

Furthermore, consultations highlighted the vital role of strong relationships between anchor institutions and the VCSE sector beyond financial support. These relationships serve as crucial enablers of the social economy's capacity, fostering collaboration, knowledge exchange, and resource sharing. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of anchor institutions exploring opportunities for co-working spaces and shared resources, extending beyond physical spaces to include expertise in areas such as business support, legal guidance, and HR advice. This approach could bridge the gap where traditional funding may be unavailable, ensuring the sustained growth and resilience of the social economy sector in Oxfordshire.

Summary

In summary, consultations highlighted the need to address challenges facing Oxfordshire's social economy. Tailored business support, exploring a community-controlled investment fund, and fostering strong relationships between anchor institutions and the VCSE sector emerged as key

priorities. By implementing strategic solutions and fostering collaboration, Oxfordshire can create opportunities for sustainable growth and prosperity within its social economy ecosystem.

Key Actions

6) Consider the utility of the current business support offer: Our consultations have suggested a disparity of opinion regarding the appropriateness of the business support offer in advancing community wealth building practice in Oxfordshire.

- a. **Audit business support alongside the VCSE sector to better understand the appropriateness and availability of the business support offer in Oxfordshire:** Consultations further suggested that existing business support offer was fragmented and there was a disagreement on the suitability of some existing offers for bespoke social economy support. Therefore, we recommend an audit of existing business support offerings throughout Oxfordshire.
- b. **Following an audit, consider additional support and available funding streams:** Additionally, consultations highlighted that current SPF funds may not be sufficient, but future SPF funding could provide an opportunity to finance a bespoke business support offer to support social economy organisations. Based on emerging practice highlighted in section two, Oxfordshire could look to Greater Manchester to emulate its Inclusive Ownership Platform, which will provide bespoke support for alternative modes of ownership and is funded via shared prosperity fund money, or to Liverpool City Region to investigate the feasibility of adopting the Kindred model. A new social economy support offer should be focused on enabling social economy businesses to start and grow by providing training and support. It could facilitate peer connectivity to help disseminate best practice. It could also be used to promote social economy products and services to other businesses and public bodies across the County.

6. Conclusion and Next Steps

As local economies such as those in Oxfordshire attempt to navigate the multiple crisis that are being faced by people and communities, the County Council could play a pivotal role in the pursuit of more inclusive local economies.

As explained in section two, the evidence is starting to suggest that community wealth building can provide an effective model for economic development that leads to substantial health benefits. What is more, and as this framework for action demonstrates, the County Council and its local authority and anchor partners have a number of key assets at their disposal that can be deployed in a more purposeful way to develop a community wealth building approach.

To this end then, the framework for action does offer something of a blueprint as to how the County and partners can start to fulfil its ambitions around social and economic development – a blueprint that is about rewiring the system, rather than tinkering around the edges.

We strongly recommend that the County Council and partners move to operationalise this action plan as soon as possible. There is not necessarily a complete logical order as to how County should approach this task and there may be quick wins and low hanging fruit that could be immediately addressed in some areas.

In conclusion, however, we would recommend that finessing the vision is fundamental and should be addressed as a matter of priority. The County Council has made a great start here but as we have made clear above, it cannot be agnostic about the kind of economic growth it will support going forward. Growth for growth's sake does not trickle down and has fuelled the very social, economic and environmental challenges we must now address.

Start small if needs be but embrace the substantive changes to practice that will be required to deliver a truly inclusive economy across the County.

7. Appendix – List of stakeholders

Name	Role	Organisation
Robin Rogers	Director Partnerships and Delivery	Oxfordshire County Council
Rosie Rowe	Head of Healthy Place Shaping	Oxfordshire County Council
John Pearce	Adults Commissioning Manager	Oxfordshire County Council
David Munday	Deputy Director of Public Health	Oxfordshire County Council
Melissa Sage	Head of Procurement	Oxfordshire County Council
Vic Kurzeja	Head of Property	Oxfordshire County Council
Chloe Taylor	Head of Economy	Oxfordshire County Council
Sean Collins	Pensions Manager	Oxfordshire County Council
Teresa Kirkham	Head of Environment and Circular Economy	Oxfordshire County Council
Michael Smedley	Head of Estates, Assets and Investments	Oxfordshire County Council
Paul Wilding	Cost of Living Programme Manager	Oxfordshire County Council
Elaine North	Education, Employment & Training Manager	Oxfordshire County Council

Sam Lees	HR Lead for Inclusive Employment	Oxfordshire County Council
Fulya Markham	Strategy Lead – Age Well, Live Well	Oxfordshire County Council
Emily Schofield	Head of Strategy	Oxfordshire County Council
Jessie Dobson	Partnership Youth Development Manager	Oxfordshire County Council
Martin Goff	Head of Access to Learning	Oxfordshire County Council
Charles Butters	Interim Senior Strategic Assets Officer	Oxfordshire County Council
Hannah Goodlad	Operations Manager – Assets & Investments	Oxfordshire County Council
Will Gardner	Employment Support Manager – Print Finishers	Oxfordshire County Council
Karen Hopwood	Head of Organisational Development	Oxfordshire County Council
Becky Spencer	Social Value Manager	Oxfordshire County Council
Rose Rolle-Rowan	Lead Commissioner for Strategy Innovation in HESC	Oxfordshire County Council
Wider public sector		
Richard Byard	Director of Business Development	OxLEP
Lyn Davies	Director of Corporate Services	OxLEP
Emma Coles	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Programme Manager	Oxford City Council (OIEP)

Jeremy Long	Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Co-Chair	OIEP and Oxford University
Simon Grove-White	Principle Economic Development Officer	Oxford City Council
Clayton Lavallin	Economic Development Lead	Oxford City Council
Mish Tullar	Head of Strategy	Oxford City Council
Nick King	Economic Development Manager	South and Vale District Councils
Ben Watson	Exchequer and Procurement Lead	South and Vale District Councils
Steven Newman	Economic Development Officer	Cherwell District Council
Richard Fowles	Procurement Lead	Thames Valley Police
Claire Widdison	Head of Strategy	Thames Valley Police
James Gilpin	Oxfordshire Employer Engagement Manager	DWP
Health		
Chris Wright	Oxfordshire Partnerships Lead	ICB
Dan Leveson	Place Director for Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire West ICB	ICB
Steve Goldensmith	BOB ICS Head of Prevention and Health Inequalities	ICB

Sam Shepherd	Interim Director of Strategy and Partnerships	OUH
Nileema Patel	Public Health Registrar	OUH
Wendy Cheeseman	Head of Estates Sustainability	OUH
Zheng Yaolin	Public Health Registrar	OUH
Helen Vincent	Strategic Delivery Lead	Oxford Health Foundation Trust
John Upham	Sustainability Manager	Oxford Health Foundation Trust
Education		
Dr Helen Carstairs	Head of Regional Engagement and Knowledge Exchange	Oxford University
Alex Betts	Local and Global Engagement Officer	Oxford University
Jo Sibbald	Procurement Lead	Oxford University
Giles Orr	Head of Business and External Engagement	Oxford Brookes University
Cat Marin	Group Director	Activate Learning
Rebecca Iley	Director of Employability	Activate Learning
Sarah Separovic	HR Director	River Learning Trust
Susie Morrissey	Transformation Director	River Learning Trust

Caroline Isaac-Hamdan	Employability and Partnerships Lead	Adviza
Charity, social enterprise and third sector		
Grant Hayward	Operations and Enterprise Support Manager	OSEP
Anais Bozetine	CWB Manager	Owned By Oxford / CAG
Emily Lewis-Edwards	CEO	Community First Oxfordshire
Zoe Springings	CEO	Oxfordshire Community Foundation
Amy Lockwood	CEO	Oxford Hub
Anthony Leonard	Operations Director	SOFEA
Andy Attwood	Site Director	SOFEA
Fiona Steel	CEO	Good Food Oxfordshire
Other/local businesses		
Megan Carter	People Director	Blenheim Palace
Veronica Reynolds	Sustainability and Community Manager	Milton Park
Maria Warner	Procurement Lead	ODS Group
Natalie Snowden	Procurement Lead	ODS
Rosabella Robertson	Net Zero Engagement Specialist	SSEN

Jodie McNamara	Director	ARC Campus
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Centre for Local Economic Strategies

CLES, 52 Oak Street, Swan Square
Manchester, United Kingdom, M4 5JA
info@cles.org.uk | www.cles.org.uk
@CLEStinkdo | #clestinkdo