

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET

16 September 2025

Oxfordshire Employment Services Report of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
 - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
 - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Council's Oxfordshire Employment Services at its meeting on 26 June 2025. The report provided an update on the achievements of the Oxfordshire Employment Services and the County Print Finishers.
4. The Committee would like to thank Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services, Victoria Baren, Deputy Director for Adult Social Care, Stephen Chandler, Executive Director for People, Sam Harper, Head of Learning Disability Provision Services, Debbie Montgomery, Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager for Oxfordshire Employment Services, Nicola Dyche, Strategic Commissioner for Workforce Adult Social Care, and Jenny Taylor, Workforce

Associate for County Print Finishers, for attending to present and to answer questions, and for attending to answer questions.

SUMMARY

5. The Director of Adult Social Services introduced the Oxfordshire Employment Services, and highlighted the excellent work done by the County Print Finishers. She described how the Connect to Work programme, a nationally supported employment initiative locally delivered in Oxfordshire by the County Council and Enterprise Oxfordshire, aimed to support 2,000 people over the next five years, through tailored employment pathways.
6. The Committee was grateful to hear the first-hand experiences of the good work Oxfordshire Employment Services does from Jenny Taylor, a Workforce Associate at County Print Finishers. Her insight of how she was supported and the impact it has had on her was valuable to the Committee.
7. Members raised several questions with the officers focusing on employment targets and outcomes; the support offered to those eligible under the Connect to Work programme; the scope and eligibility of the scheme; and about the partners and businesses supporting Oxfordshire Employment Services.
8. The Committee makes two recommendations, focusing on strengthening Oxfordshire Employment Services by exploring the potential of an accreditation scheme to boost business engagement, and by expanding the service's scope and capacity to better support residents into employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

9. As part of its discussions, the Committee identified the challenge of increasing employer engagement. While the Council has employed individuals through the scheme in various departments, broader employer participation is necessary.
10. Engagement is currently facilitated through webinars and partnerships with companies such as Grondon and Thames Water. Additional incentives may be considered to promote further collaborations with more companies, supporting the goal of assisting 2,000 disabled people through tailored employment pathways.
11. The Committee considered whether an accreditation scheme could encourage employer participation by recognising businesses that adopt inclusive employment practices consistent with those used by Oxfordshire Employment Service. This scheme could set expectations, share best practices, and build a community of supportive employers. Evaluating the feasibility and potential impact of such a scheme aligned with the Council's strategic objective to advance inclusive employment and promote equal access to opportunity.

- ***Recommendation 1: That the Council should explore whether an accreditation scheme would be an effective strategy to encourage businesses to work with Oxfordshire Employment Services.***
12. Oxfordshire Employment Services has a long-standing record of success in supporting individuals with disabilities and long-term health conditions into meaningful employment. The current Connect to Work programme, with its target of supporting 2,000 people over five years, reflects both the scale of ambition and the service's proven capability.
 13. The Committee welcomed this target but believes that, given the rising demand and the service's strong outcomes—including a projected 65% job offer rate for supported internships—there is a clear case for expanding the programme. Increasing the target to 2,500 individuals over the same five-year period would allow more residents to benefit from the life-changing impact of employment support.
 14. Sustained employment is not only a route to independence and financial stability but also a key preventative measure in health and social care. It reduces reliance on public services, improves wellbeing, and supports the Council's wider goals around inclusion, early intervention, and reducing inequalities.
- ***Recommendation 2: That the Council should expand and enhance the work of Oxfordshire Employment Services by increasing the Connect to Work programme target from 2,000 to 2,500 individuals over five years, in recognition of the service's success and the wider social and health benefits of sustained employment.***

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
16. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2.3 (v) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Anita Bradley
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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