

Annual report

2025–2026

greener | fairer | healthier Oxfordshire

Foreword

Welcome to Oxfordshire County Council's annual report, providing an overview of our performance and key achievements from April 2025 to March 2026.

Our vision remains to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. This is rooted in strong local communities, healthy places to live, and a sustainable and inclusive economy that benefits everyone. Throughout the year, we have continued to work in partnership with residents, businesses and organisations to deliver this vision and improve people's lives.

In November 2025 the council agreed a new Strategic Plan for 2025–2028, setting out our priorities and how we will deliver meaningful change for residents. This report highlights the progress we have made in delivering that plan, including early work on our nine headline projects and wider objectives.

Fairness sits at the heart of everything we do – ensuring that opportunities are shared between communities and between generations. We are committed to providing accessible services, tackling inequalities, and enabling everyone to thrive. This includes

supporting residents through the cost of living, improving outcomes for children and young people, and helping people to live healthy, independent lives for as long as possible.

We have made tangible progress in delivering our priorities, including action on the climate emergency, improvements to transport and infrastructure, and support for residents facing barriers into employment. These achievements reflect both the early delivery of our Strategic Plan and the dedication of our workforce and partners – because we are at our best when we work together with communities and organisations across Oxfordshire.

Looking ahead, the landscape for local government is changing. The programme of local government reorganisation and the opportunities presented by devolution will shape how services are delivered in the future. In the short to medium term the Government's current financial settlement means the council's grant funding is expected to reduce by £27.2 million by 2028/29. Alongside the need to address a £5.4 million budget gap in 2026/27, this will require the council to identify further savings in order to set balanced

budgets in future years and that will only be possible by reducing some of our activities and making difficult decisions that constrain what we deliver.

While this brings uncertainty and challenges, we are committed to working constructively with government, partners and our communities to ensure that any changes deliver the best possible outcomes for Oxfordshire's residents.

As we move forward, we will continue to listen, adapt and innovate, ensuring that we make the most of these opportunities while remaining focused on delivering high-quality services for our residents every day.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and for your continued interest in the work of the council.



**Councillor
Tim Bearder,**
Leader of Oxfordshire
County Council

Our nine headline projects

to be delivered by March 2028

Our vision is to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. This is centred around strong and connected communities, healthy places to live, and a thriving local economy that benefits everyone.



Greener Oxfordshire

1. Create better spaces for residents and visitors in our town centres.

2. Work with transport partners towards a countywide integrated rail and bus offer.

3. Create two dedicated highways response teams to tackle issues in priority areas.



Fairer Oxfordshire

4. Roll out a network of family hubs.

5. Through initiatives like Connect to Work, help people overcome barriers to employment.

6. Support young people leaving care into employment.



Healthier Oxfordshire

7. Increase the number of children who reach a good level of development at age five.

8. Deliver more specialist school places for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

9. Support an expanded and coordinated programme of youth provision.



Greener

Our strategic priorities

We want our communities to enjoy clean air, access to green space, and safe and sustainable ways to move around.

This means reducing traffic congestion and investing in public transport, cycling and walking; protecting our natural environment; and helping Oxfordshire respond and adapt to a changing climate.

We were ranked the UK's best performing county council, **topping Climate Emergency UK's 2025 scorecard** for climate action for the second consecutive year.

We were confirmed as England's **top-performing waste disposal authority** for the 12th year running, with 56.3% of household waste recycled, reused or composted.

We introduced a **temporary congestion charge in Oxford**. Monitoring data to March 2026 showed faster bus journeys on key routes, increased usage of park and ride, and improved traffic flow in the city centre.



We **developed OxRail 2040**, an ambitious 15-year plan to improve rail connectivity through new stations, electrification and service upgrades, and helped secure £120m to reopen the Cowley Branch Line.

A £7.4m **surface treatment programme** improved roads across 70 towns and villages, treating over 930,000 square metres of carriageway.

We collected £50.6m in infrastructure developer contributions for initiatives that will **mitigate against the impact of developments**.

We established **lane rental powers**, which we anticipate will generate £2m a year for highway maintenance work.

We awarded £1.4m to bus companies and community transport groups to deliver **new and converted electric buses** and improve passenger experience.



The **Energy Saver App solar scheme** passed 100 installations, helping households generate renewable energy and cut bills.

We improved our **recording and analysis of flood data** and **expanded our flood warden scheme** to allow us to deliver proactive advice and report issues in local communities.

We introduced a **new booking system for our recycling centres** and explained how to pre-sort materials before visiting them to help reduce long queues at peak times.

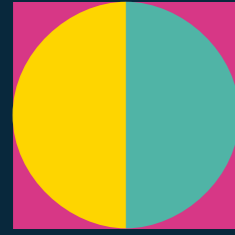
Around **26,000 tonnes of food waste** was recycled, producing biogas that generated the equivalent of 11,767 megawatt-hours of electricity. This is enough to power approximately 4,358 homes for an entire year.

Community Action Groups held over **350 repair cafes** across the county, helping residents to save money by keeping items in use and reducing the amount of waste thrown away.

We deployed new **Highways Asset Response Teams**, taking a proactive, community-focused approach to targeted highway repairs, maintenance and clean-ups in areas most in need.

We delivered the **275th 20mph scheme**, improving safety and liveability in residential neighbourhoods.





Fairer

Our strategic priorities

We want all our residents to benefit from the advantages our county has to offer.

This means supporting a local economy that benefits everyone; assisting people who face challenges in finding work; making our services as easy to access as possible; and helping communities in need.

- Our **£6.72m cost of living programme** delivered over **219,000 individual interventions** for residents facing financial crisis, including crisis payments and preventative support, from supermarket vouchers to energy meter top ups.

- The introduction of a **low income family tracker** has helped identify residents who are missing out on government support, generating £1.5 million in additional income for households through improved take-up of benefits.

- **Adult social care services were rated 'Good'** by the Care Quality Commission, recognising strong partnership working across health and care.

- We launched our **Connect to Work programme** to support residents facing health, disability or social barriers into employment, with the first job in place by March 2026.

- A new co-produced agreement with My Life My Choice **strengthened support for people with learning disabilities** through lived-experience-led services.

- We opened a **brand-new extra care housing scheme** in Faringdon. We now have 21 extra care schemes, offering older residents the opportunity to live independently with 24/7 care and support on site when needed.

- A **Community Catalysts** project which supports local people to set up small, community based enterprises was expanded to West Oxfordshire to help meet demand among older people for access to flexible, personalised support closer to home in rural areas.



- We spent £3.49m ensuring families of children entitled to free school meals received **support with food costs** during the school holidays.

- We piloted a programme with four secondary schools to provide **healthy snacks for pupils** from low-income households, which resulted in improved attendance, behaviour and readiness to learn.

- We created over £246k in **social value** through our tendering activities, from using local businesses in our supply chain to using local residents employed on local contracts.

- The **first all female fire and rescue crew** in 20 years is responding to emergencies in Oxfordshire.

- In November 2025 Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission confirmed Oxfordshire had taken **effective action in all priority areas to improve SEND services.**

- Over £1m per year was approved to **expand SEND enhanced pathways** in mainstream schools, supporting nearly 300 children.

- **Specialist careers advisers** were introduced in SEND schools to support young people into education, training and employment.





Healthier

Our strategic priorities

We want all our residents to be happy, healthy and safe.

This means helping children get the best start in life; creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential; supporting older people to age well and stay independent for as long as possible; and encouraging everyone to make healthy choices.



- Public health evidence showed **progress in reducing health inequalities**, with the number of Oxfordshire communities in the most deprived national deciles falling from 10 to 8 since 2019.
- We completed our first **Local Policy Lab fellowship programme** with Oxford University and Oxford Brookes University, translating academic research into practical policy action on health inequalities.
- A **Tobacco Control Strategy 2026–2030** was published, setting out joint action with partners to reduce smoking rates below 5 per cent.

- We delivered **17,863 NHS health checks** across the county to those aged between 40 and 74.
- We were recognised as establishing a **substantial network for walking, wheeling and cycling in the county**, providing access to a £20m investment over a four year period.
- Home First supported over **4,500 people to leave hospital safely** and provided support to **achieve independence on 1,586 occasions**. More than three-quarters went on to achieve full independence.

- Three new **school street trials** in Carterton, Banbury and Didcot were approved, along with an extension of an existing trial in Headington. School streets restrict motor vehicle access around schools during start and finish times, making the environment safer and healthier for families.
- The **Waiting Well** programme launched with NHS partners to help people improve health outcomes while waiting for surgery.
- Seven schools benefitted from **Action on Carbon and Energy in Schools (ACES) support** services and energy assessments, which ensures that schools are warm and comfortable for children during the winter.
- Developed collaboratively, we **launched DadPad**, an app for fathers offering practical parenting tips and key insights into child development.

- 87** households across the county are benefitting from warmer, healthier homes and lower energy bills thanks to our **Warm Homes: Local Grant** scheme, with 300+ more receiving solar panels and battery storage under an innovative trial subscription model.
- We seized **43,460** counterfeit or smuggled cigarette sticks with an estimated street value of **£15,211.39kg** of other tobacco-related products, such as hand-rolling and chewing tobacco were also seized. This work protects residents and removes income from serious organised crime.
- We had 19,099 conversations with residents about health and wellbeing, through our **Making Every Conversation Count** initiative across Oxfordshire libraries.



Awards, events and achievements



We hosted two **innovation showcases in Westminster** in June and November 2025, working with Advanced Oxford to bring together parliamentarians and businesses to highlight the county's strengths in future transport and advanced manufacturing.

In February 2026 we joined Oxford University in signing a **memorandum of understanding** with the University of Liverpool and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. The partnership is designed to drive research led innovation, supporting growth in life sciences, climate solutions and advanced technologies.

Together with partners, we submitted an expression of interest to the government in March 2026 for a **Thames Valley foundation strategic authority**. This would give us additional powers to coordinate bus and other regional services outside of Oxfordshire's borders.

In October 2025 we hosted the **UK's Ambassador to the EU** on a two-day visit to showcase the county's strengths in science, technology, education and agriculture, and to arrange meetings with local businesses and partners to promote trade and investment.

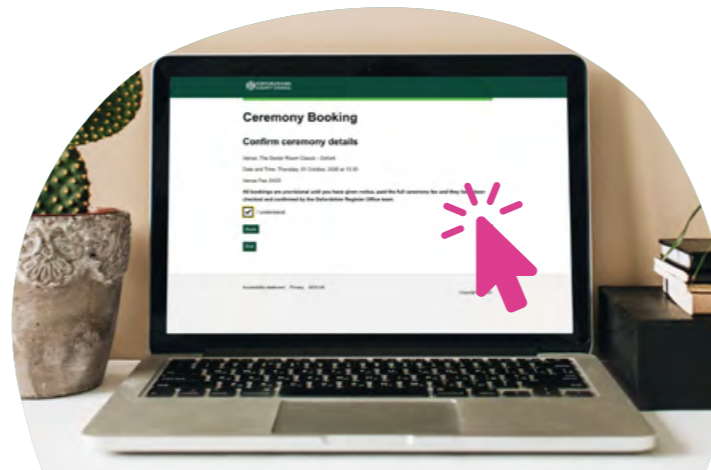


Our pioneering local government accelerator programme, delivered through our **Innovate Oxfordshire service**, collaborated with 259 local businesses and entrepreneurs to tackle major challenges in the adult social care sector.

We **worked with law students at the City of Oxford College** following the Activate Learning/T Level Law programme on a project designed to improve their understanding of the Law in Practice.

After the election in May 2025, we **welcomed 38 new councillors** into an expanded council of 69 members.

In January 2026 we **launched online bookings for citizenship and marriage or civil partnership ceremonies** - making it far easier for people to choose and manage how they contact us.

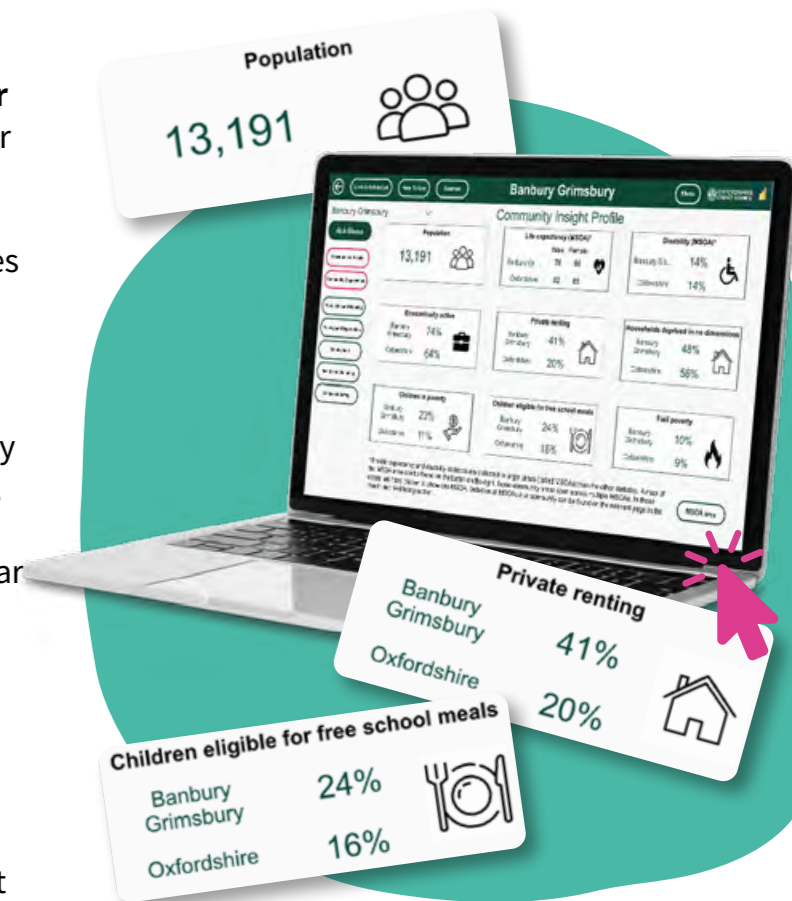


In January 2026 we retained gold status in the **Armed Forces Employer Recognition Scheme**, recognising our strong support for serving personnel, veterans, reservists and their families through flexible employment practices and the Armed Forces Covenant.

It was a double-win for our **climate action team**, scooping the 2025 Utility Week Award in Net Zero Engagement, plus the Edie Net-Zero Awards Smart Systems & Flexibility Project of the Year category.

We have transformed how residents access information about council services by **embedding artificial intelligence (AI) into our contact centre**, enabling faster, more efficient responses and providing round the clock support through web and voice bots.

Our HR team won a **PPMA Excellence in People Management Award** for the Best Employer and Trade Union Partnership with UNISON.



Our Public Health team were shortlisted for **two national LARIA research impact awards** to recognise our work using data to tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire and to develop community insight profiles.

Awards, events and achievements



- Oxford's electric bus programme, in which we are a partner, won **Best Public Transport Decarbonisation at the Decarbonising Transport Awards 2026**. The introduction of 159 electric buses has reduced carbon emissions by 7,233 tonnes per year and cut roadside nitrogen dioxide levels by 24 per cent.
- In the **2026 Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards**, our Public Affairs team was shortlisted in the 'small team of the year' category.

- The MyBus multi operator ticket was named among the **world's top three regional integrated ticketing schemes at the 2026 Transport Ticketing Global Awards**.

The award recognises partnership working across Oxfordshire to make bus travel simpler, fairer and more affordable, particularly for young people.



- Our Customer Experience team received a **Zoom Customer Experience Europe Excellence Award 2025** for transforming resident services with Zoom Contact Centre and AI, cutting wait times by over a half.
- In the 2026 MJ Awards, our **Digital Infrastructure Programme team was shortlisted** in the 'community engagement' category, and the **Oxfordshire Migration Partnership** in the 'innovation in housing' category.

- Our community partnership team was shortlisted in the **care team category at the 2025 Oxfordshire Care Awards**. The team provides activities for adults with additional needs from Mayott House, an assisted living residence in Abingdon, as well as outreach support for adults identified as needing more one-to-one, personalised care.
- Innovate Oxfordshire's Digital Infrastructure Programme won the **Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA) 2025 Award** for Best Public Sector or Community Project for our GigaHubs initiative. The programme has delivered gigabit-capable broadband to 192 rural public service sites, including schools, GP surgeries, libraries and community centres.

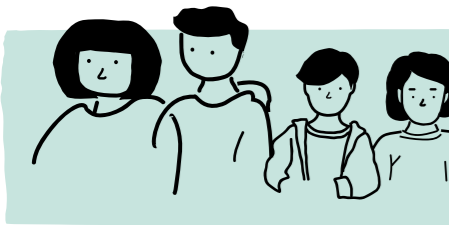


- The Oxfordshire Museum achieved national recognition for the quality of its educational visits with a **Learning Outside the Classroom quality badge** for its work inspiring and engaging young people about Oxfordshire's history.

2025/26 in figures



We recorded **7,234** births and **6,138** deaths.



We cared for **1,086** children.

711 children had a foster placement in year; this includes kinship.

204 children had a residential placement.



We conducted and registered **2,460** civil partnership and marriage ceremonies.



We welcomed **122,390** visitors to the Oxfordshire Museum, providing free access to the county's history.



93.9 per cent of applicants were awarded their first choice of primary school.

85.4 per cent of applicants were awarded their first choice of secondary school.

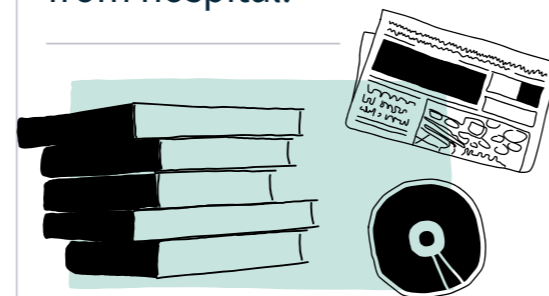
Both relate to 2026/27 entry.

Our employment service supported **49** people to find work.



We provided **30,484** hours of home care per week to support people to live at home in their communities.

We supported **7,155** people to be discharged from hospital.



Our libraries welcomed **2,056,321** visitors.

This represents an increase of almost six per cent on the previous year.



Our rights of way team repaired and replaced a total of **152** bridges, cleared **173** hazardous trees and cleared **300km** of summer vegetation.



Our inspectors of weights and measures tested and verified **439** items of weighing and measuring equipment.



We planted **1,011** trees, inspected more than **11,000** individual or groups of trees, and arranged and completed more than **5,000** tree care operations.



We repaired **30,841** potholes and **37,233** highways defects overall.



Our trading standards team conducted over **1,595** interventions with Oxfordshire businesses, providing advice and support, testing products and procedures.



Our fire and rescue service attended over **6,072** incidents.

They also completed **421** fire safety audits of commercial premises and **825** fire safety building regulations consultations.



Performance and feedback

Performance summary

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

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

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/performance-reportss

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 your views.

letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk



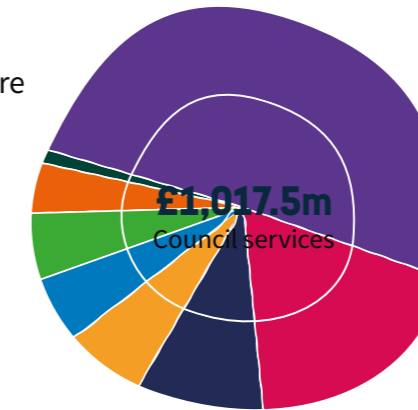
Finance

The Government's current financial settlement means the council's grant funding is expected to reduce by **£27.2 million** by 2028/29. Alongside addressing a **£5.4 million** budget gap in 2026/27 as part of the budget agreed in February 2026, this will require the council to identify further savings in order to set balanced budgets in future years.

What we spent on council services

In 2025/26 the council spent **£1,017.5m** on services – our gross expenditure. The chart below shows how much we spent on services in 2025/26.

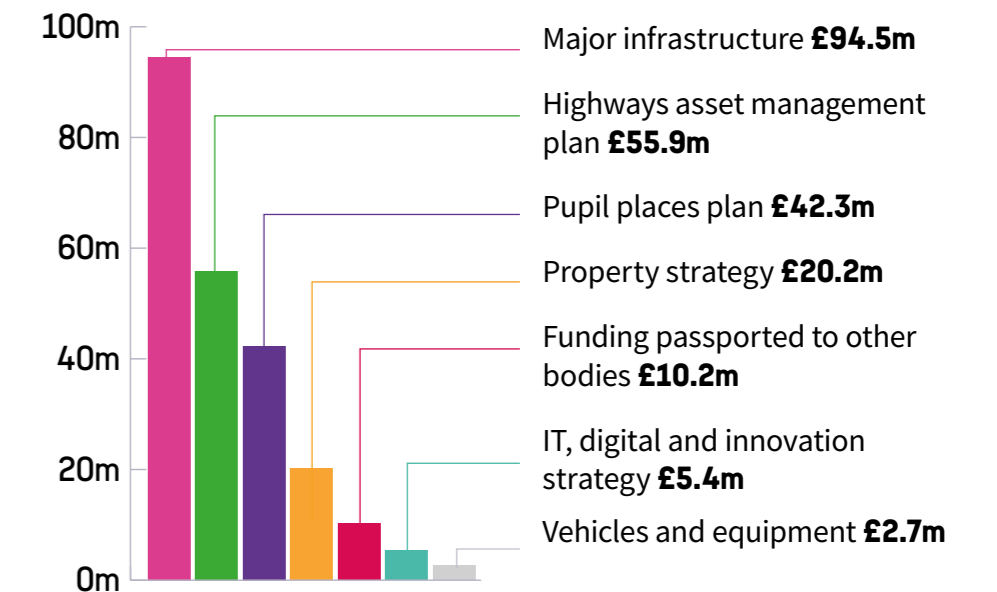
- 51%** Adult and children's social care
- 18%** Education and learning
- 10%** Highways, transport and infrastructure
- 6%** Capital borrowing and other financial costs (eg reserves)
- 5%** Public health improvement and prevention services
- 5%** Waste disposal and recycling
- 4%** Fire and rescue and community safety
- 1%** Libraries, culture and customer service



+
In addition we spent **£253m** on maintained schools and early years providers.

Capital programme

In 2025/26, we spent **£231.3m** on capital projects which included investment in highway improvements, new school buildings, and children's homes and decarbonisation of the council's buildings. This money can only be used for the purpose it has been given and cannot be allocated to day-to-day council spending.



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details

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oxfordshire.gov.uk

Let's talk



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letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk

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**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**