

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 September 2026

Integrated Social Value at OCC

**Report by Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial
Services**

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Note the range of socially valuable activity undertaken across the council and recent efforts to bring a coordinated approach that integrates relevant initiatives to maximise impact.
 - b) Endorse the council continuing to champion county-wide community impact until LGR vesting day, acknowledging that as the new Unitary Authorities are established that competing priorities may seek to localise initiatives.

Executive Summary

2. In response to requests from members, this paper articulates a landscape of 'socially valuable' activity beyond the impact of the council's statutory obligations. The paper provides an overview of a range of initiatives, how they contribute to the council's strategic priorities, and addresses key risks to the ongoing delivery of this portfolio of activities.

Background

3. The council provides a wide range of services directly to residents. These services support their health and wellbeing, provide infrastructure that connects communities, manage their waste and protects the natural environment. Each of these services delivers social value to the residents and communities in Oxfordshire.
4. This paper differentiates between the council's core services and focuses on how the council's discretionary efforts on 'socially valuable' activities deliver beyond our statutory responsibilities.
5. Previous submissions to members have taken a project-by-project approach or have fallen within officer delegated decisions. Annex 1 to this paper collates a variety of active initiatives from across the council and articulates how the respective schemes are contributing (or are planned to contribute) to the council's priorities.

6. The initiatives have been developed in response to different drivers which include:
- (a) Legal obligations (e.g. to evaluate social value commitments in tenders)
 - (b) Addressing market failures (e.g. the community funds)
 - (c) Exploring new operating models for the council (e.g. community hubs)
 - (d) Leading by example as a responsible organisation operating in the county (e.g. Net Zero strategy)

Integrated Working

7. In developing socially valuable initiatives, the council works closely with a range of partners that represent communities of residents and / or businesses. These partners help to shape the initiatives to enable more impactful outcomes. Below is a sample of the collaborations undertaken.
- (a) The council has developed a successful relationship with Oxford University Development and are actively collaborating to bring key pillars of the OxRail strategy to fruition. This includes work to explore a new railway station in Begbroke and a lynchpin for regeneration and development in the area, bringing new housing and employment opportunities to local communities.
 - (b) MGroup are one of the council's most important suppliers, holding the largest operational contract (highways maintenance) and delivering additional capital schemes as well. Due to changes in central government funding priorities, a major pillar of their social value delivery was put at risk – a scheme that supported armed forces veterans into highways employment. We connected MGroup with Enterprise Oxfordshire to explore opportunities to link skills funding to support the veterans to transition to new careers.
 - (c) In March, the council supported the Local B-corp Oxfordshire awards ceremony, building connections with a community of local businesses that are mission driven and understanding more of the barriers they face to success. This connection has helped to shape the council's approach to social value through procurement
 - (d) The council regularly shares updates and best practice with other county and unitary authorities, and with the five district councils within Oxfordshire. While the council determined that the "Match My Project" scheme championed by Oxford City Council was not appropriate for our needs (due to the hyper local, Oxford-centric projects and the high level of administrative effort), we continued to offer advice and feedback to support the development of the scheme.
 - (e) The council regularly collaborates with business representative groups including the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) and the Oxfordshire Social Enterprise Partnership (OSEP). Through these collaborations, the council is able to shape policy that supports the member organisations and reduce barriers to entry for its own supply

chains. Feedback from these groups were instrumental in shaping the council's refreshed social value policy approved by Cabinet in March 2026.

- (f) The council funded a 12-month pilot into a new care-cooperative approach for adult social care. This collaboration involved African Families in the UK, Community Catalysts, Co-operative Futures, Oxford Community Action, Oxford Brookes University, and Owned by Oxford. The decision was taken by the council to not continue the funding as the model would only work at scale, however it demonstrated the power of collaboration and the role of the council in facilitating a range of organisations and providing seed funding for new initiatives.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

- 8. With the recent minded to decision, LGR creates new complexities for OCC's delivery of socially valuable activity. Over the coming months, joint committees will be established to coordinate activities across the existing authorities. Next May will see elections of councillors to the new authorities, shortly after which new constitutions will need to be established. While OCC has an enduring responsibility to ensure value is delivered for residents in the long-term, vesting day of 1st April 2028 sets a timeframe beyond which OCC cannot unduly obligate the new authorities. Together, these pressures necessarily place a constraint on the level of ambition and duration of socially valuable initiatives.
- 9. Over the coming months until vesting day, OCC will continue to champion initiatives that have a meaningful positive impact for residents and communities county-wide. The aim is to play a leading role in shaping the social value approaches for the new authorities, collaborating with peers in existing authorities to propose ambitious contributions to the new constitutions and policies.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

- 10. Delivery of socially valuable activity directly contributes towards OCC's "Fairer" strategic objective. Most, if not all, of the initiatives aim to create new opportunities for under-represented individuals, support growth in Oxfordshire-based VCSEs and SMEs, and support delivery of OCC's responsibilities to the most vulnerable in our communities.

Financial Implications

The financial implications section should be completed by a member of the finance service

- 11. No programme-level resources are allocated to ensure coordination of social value linked initiatives across OCC, except for circa 0.5 FTE within Commercial and Procurement. Responsibility sits within BAU officer roles to ensure

individual projects are resourced appropriately (including any requests for funding) and are coordinated with other initiatives across the council.

Comments checked by:
Drew Hodgson
Strategic Finance Business Partner
drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

The legal implications section should be completed by a member of the legal service

12. There are no direct legal implications of this report as it covers an overview of individual initiatives linked to delivering “socially valuable” outcomes. Legal implications will be considered on a project-by-project basis with advice given that relate to the specific issues of each initiative.

Comments checked by: Jayne Pringle, Principal Solicitor- Contracts

Staff Implications

13. The report does not recommend the deployment of any additional staff or other resources. Socially valuable activity continues to be delivered by BAU resources across OCC, now with greater coordination to avoid duplication, overlap, or confusion with target communities.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

14. This report does not present any direct equality & inclusion impacts. Socially valuable activities underway across OCC directly or indirectly contribute to a fairer Oxfordshire for residents. Any necessary EIA will be completed on a project-by-project basis to ensure an appropriate level of detail is available.

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

15. Each authority involved in the Oxfordshire / West Berkshire LGR programme have different definitions and priorities for social impact. These are largely defined by the different geographic and service-linked responsibilities of each authority. Each socially valuable initiative underway through OCC will form part of the respective services’ disaggregation workstream with the overarching policy for social value to be part of the Procurement & Contracts workstream.
16. The new Unitary Authorities will need to establish their own policies for social value based on appetite, resources, and new local priorities. The Procurement & Contracts workstream will provide options to the new authorities based on

current experience of what is working well, where the need lies, and how the current authorities see the opportunities.

Sustainability Implications

17. This report does not present any direct sustainability impacts. Socially valuable activities underway across OCC directly or indirectly contribute to a greener environment for Oxfordshire residents. Any necessary SIA will be completed on a project-by-project basis to ensure an appropriate level of detail is available.

Risk Management

18. There are a small number of strategic risks related to OCC's socially valuable activities. These are captured below with short descriptions and mitigations / management actions.

Risk	Risk Level	Mitigation / Management Action
Financial <i>Investment in socially valuable activity beyond core statutory services creates additional budget pressures</i>	L	Commercial oversight and coordination with Finance to ensure spend on socially valuable activities is connected to delivery of OCC's mission and statutory responsibilities.
Reputational <i>Delivery of socially valuable activity is seen as the "wrong" initiative or is a distraction from projects the council "should" be spending time on</i>	M	Each initiative to have clear link back to legal obligations and / or delivery of OCC's mission and statutory responsibilities. Any contentious initiatives to have proactive comms to support landing the "why" message with relevant stakeholders.
Compliance <i>A lack of understanding internally leads to non-compliance with both OCC Social Value Policy and / or legal obligations under the Procurement Act 2023</i>	M	Social Value to form part of the Commercial Curriculum ensuring training and support is available for internal colleagues. Additional guidance material and structured templates provided to ensure compliance by design.
Political <i>The new Government extend the amended central government social value policy to local government authorities, restricting social value to considering only job creation and growth.</i>	M	Work with peers from other authorities and the LGA to champion the current broader definition of social value which better aligns to the broad responsibilities of local government authorities. Maximise the impact of our new social value policy in the short to medium term.
LGR <i>The 3UA model creates barriers to key initiatives that would have been based on county-wide strengths as</i>	H	Utilise the system-wide Procurement & Contracts workstream to share current practice, policy, and social value principles to seek early alignment around shared best practice.

<i>they do not align to the new authority boundaries. Different approaches and priorities between existing authorities and new authorities creates barriers to delivery in the 12-months before vesting day.</i>		Ensure socially valuable activity is factored into Vertical workstreams and considered in disaggregation planning.
--	--	--

Consultations

19. N/A

Ian Dyson, Director of Financial & Commercial Services

Annex: Annex 1 – Overview of socially valuable activity across OCC

Background papers: OCC Published Social Value Policy: [Social Value Policy | Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Contact Officer: Richard Scarlett, Head of Commercial & Procurement

September 2026

Annex 1 – Overview of socially valuable activity across OCC

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
Social Value in Procurement	Social Value Policy <i>The implementation of the recently approved social value policy, setting clear priorities and expectations for suppliers to contribute to OCC's strategic mission.</i>					
	Commercial Strategy <i>The overarching strategy driving OCC to achieve greater value from all external engagements, covering financial, social, and operational sources of value.</i>					
	Commercial Continuous Improvement <i>The ongoing improvement in the efficacy of the commercial function through better training, guidance, and templates.</i>					
	Payment Terms <i>Differentiating payment terms for SMEs and VCSEs to support cashflow and encourage economic growth.</i>					
	Social Value Prospectus <i>A curated resource for out-of-county suppliers to select opportunities from to deliver social value back to Oxfordshire</i>					

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
	<i>residents if they are unable to deliver any material impact from their own initiatives.</i>					
Community Investment	Councillor Priority Fund <i>£10,000 budget per Councillor to support projects in their division until end of FY2027-28.</i>					
	Community Capacity Fund <i>Supporting small community groups with grant funding to support Oxfordshire residents to live well in their communities, remaining independent and health for as long as possible.</i>					
	Connected Communities Fund <i>Funding to support community groups with initiatives to reduce isolation and increase connection.</i>					
Community Assets	Community Asset Transfer Policy <i>Enabling the transfer of under-utilised council assets to community groups on preferential terms on the basis that the asset is used for community good.</i>					
	Community Asset Leasing Policy <i>Improving the utilisation and impact of council assets through preferential leasing arrangements to community groups on the basis that the asset is used for community good.</i>					

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
Community Delivery	Community Action Group (CAG) Oxfordshire <i>A model of centre-led community groups working to make communities more sustainable places to live.</i>					
	Community Catalysts <i>Establishing micro-level community care organisations.</i>					
	External Research Endorsement <i>Utilising OCC's brand to endorse relevant third-party research proposals so that external funding is allocated to projects that align with OCC's mission.</i>					
	Best Start Family Hubs <i>Coordinated service delivery to help new families from pregnancy through early years and beyond.</i>					
	Community Hubs <i>Coordinated service delivery to help local communities access services earlier and more conveniently helping to prevent more complex demand.</i>					
Responsible Operations	Net Zero Strategy <i>Targeting Net Zero council operations by 2030 to contribute to tackling the climate crisis while also delivering benefits to OCC.</i>					
	Operational Waste Reuse & Recycling					

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
	<i>Minimising the environmental impact of OCC's own operation.</i>					
	Care-leaver Support <i>Recognising the unique responsibilities that OCC has to children we care for and supporting their transition to independent living.</i>					
	Local Area Investment Plans <i>Developing coordinated plans that attract OCC and third-party investment into communities.</i>					