

Budget

Despite the many financial pressures facing councils, especially county councils, we successfully passed a budget in February bringing extra investment into areas such as highways maintenance (£5m extra), and flood prevention, while also protecting existing services.

The budget contained real terms increases for both adults and children's social care, including a ten per cent real terms increase for children's services aimed at helping children stay at home where possible, and in Oxfordshire when they need residential support. There was also extra support for early intervention work in education, and cost of living support for local advice centres.

Councillor Priority Grants are still funded; last year I was able to contribute to Berry Youth Centre holidays programme and new rugby posts in Berinsfield, a solar-powered defibrillator in Newton, a new entrance sign for Garsington parish, and hedge-planting in Dorchester.

Highways and Road Safety

Agreed unanimously in July 2022, the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan outlines a clear vision to deliver a net-zero Oxfordshire transport and travel system that enables the county to thrive while protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents.

Rollout has continued of **20mph zones**, always at the request of communities, including almost all the villages in my division, with many residents already noting marked improvements such as reduced road noise and easier road crossing. Several more 20mph areas are due to be delivered in the coming months, including in Berinsfield, Culham, and the Baldons.

The council has made further successful bids for **Active Travel funding** for walking, wheeling and cycling routes, and developed high level plans for a **Strategic Active Travel Network** linking key locations across the county. Locally, consultants have been commissioned to work up proposals for the **Berinsfield-Oxford** route, looking at both the A4074 and the Roman Road bridleway, and I expect to see something we can look and comment on by the autumn. Of course, the design is just the first step, and the funding for the project delivery still needs to be found.

I'm currently working with officers on options to improve road safety on the A4074 and at the A415 Culham road crossing.

Of course, the outcome of the government inspector's decision on the HIF1 road scheme will have a major effect on our area: this is expected later in the summer.

Change in political administration

From May 2021-September 2023 Oxfordshire County Council was run by the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance, an alliance between the Lib Dem, Labour and Green parties. In September 2023, the Labour group left the Alliance, leaving the County Cabinet comprising 8 Lib Dem councillors and one Green member. Since this time, the administration has been able to continue successfully running the council.

Oxfordshire County Council strategic plan, key themes and outcomes

Oxfordshire County Council's [Outcomes Framework](#) is the strategic top-level overview which enables the council to plan, monitor, measure, and review delivery. The outcomes framework is made up of a number of key performance indicators (KPIs), and qualitative progress measures. This approach helps to create a 'golden thread' from the administration's ambitions for Oxfordshire residents through to delivery on the ground.

The Alliance's nine cross-cutting priorities and commitments remain in place, although are also summarised as three themes: **Greener, Fairer, and Healthier.**

County Council takes on Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

On that last point, working with local business and partners, it was agreed in March that the County Council will be taking oversight for the [Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership](#) (often known as OxLEP). This comes after the government announced LEPs will cease to have official recognition and that their functions should be transferred to local authorities. OxLEP has previously been responsible for some county-level economic planning and support. Initially, the LEP has been transferred in its existing form, pending a 6-month review of the best way to deliver this service in the future.

"Good" OFSTED report for Children's Services

Ofsted has rated the county council's children's services as **good** following the inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS) visit last month.

Inspectors judged children's services as good across all five areas of their criteria:

1. Overall effectiveness.
2. Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.
3. Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.
4. Experiences and progress of children in care.
5. Experiences and progress of care leavers.

Inspectors praised the county council for a number of improvements across services since the last inspection in 2018, leading to even better outcomes for children and young people. In 2018, while we were also rated good overall, criteria three above was judged as *requires improvement*.

Director of Public Health's report

Producing an annual report is a requirement for all directors of public health. The reports look independently at issues which affect the health and wellbeing of the population in Oxfordshire and make recommendations for improvement. In his [annual report](#) Oxfordshire County Council's Director of Public Health, Ansaf Azhar, has called climate change one of most significant threats to the population both in Oxfordshire and globally.

He said: "Our environment significantly influences our health. Recent flooding in Oxfordshire brought this into the spotlight, where some suffered a loss of livelihood and we saw a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing. These events are going to be more common going forward. This is why I want to talk about the health impacts of climate change and the positive benefits of climate action for individuals, families and communities."

Oxford United Stadium

An agreement has been reached on heads of terms for the county council to lease land it owns near Kidlington for Oxford United to develop a new football stadium. The council's cabinet agreed in principle for land known as the "triangle" to be leased at its meeting in September 2023.

In addition to agreeing heads of terms, the lease of land comes with a number of conditions that the club must meet. These were agreed by the council's cabinet in September 2023.

These include the club securing planning permission from Cherwell District Council, the production of a net zero carbon plan and a detailed set of proposals that show how the club will meet its commitments around improving public transport, sustainable transport and infrastructure connectivity.