

County Councillor Report
Chinnor division
Annual Report May 2026

Cllr Georgina Heritage

georgina.heritage@oxfordshire.gov.uk



I was privileged to be elected as your county councillor in May 2025 and I certainly hit the ground running as I received correspondence from residents and parish councils almost immediately, all of which helped me develop a fuller understanding of the division's priorities and issues, which I continue to build on.

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for a huge list of services in our county, from schools and children in our care, to public health, social services, fire & rescue, to supporting adults leaving hospital, to emergency accommodation for people fleeing domestic violence... and so much more vital work in our communities. Yet I know that what most people see every day are mainly **Highways** and FixMyStreet issues, and this certainly makes up a lot of the correspondence I receive. I really couldn't write this report without focusing on potholes and road resurfacing, and I very much share residents' frustration about the poor condition of the roads.

It may not be widely known that around 70% of OCC's income has to be dedicated to statutory adults and children's services. This leaves around 30% to spend on highways, fire and safety, public health, libraries and everything else the council is responsible for. The situation hasn't been made easier by the recent government funding cuts in Oxfordshire, which in turn embedded a required 4.99% council tax increase. So where does that leave our road repairs?...

The Highways teams are dealing with a huge number of defects across our network. The overall condition and winter wet weather patterns exacerbated the number of potholes appearing in Oxfordshire and, while the council naturally plans for the work demand to increase over the winter period, the recent level was evidently not expected and created huge challenges.

Highways now has an unprecedented number of crews repairing defects – 25 teams as I write (which are made up of 16 traditional crews, 4 dragon patchers, 2 thermal patching crews and 3 Bobcat crews). They prioritise the defects which pose the greatest safety concerns first and, depending on the situation, they may carry out a temporary fill at first. A lot of potholes received temporary repairs over the past few months, just to make them safe to drive over until permanent repairs could be carried out. The real repair and patching work is now taking place in earnest, and in April 2026 95% of repairs carried out were permanent.

The 2026 surface dressing programme has also begun (treating over 1,038,708 sqm of carriageway in Oxfordshire) and the drains & gullies work is ongoing. We were pleased to introduce annual drain & gully work in 2025 after years of "managed decline", but this inevitably exposed collapsed drains and other defects which are also being addressed.

As anyone who has driven over the border to Stokenchurch will be aware, Oxfordshire is definitely not alone in these challenges! The condition of the network is ultimately the result of significant number of years of under investment in preventative maintenance. We are continually working with our contractor on how we can improve what we do within the constraints we have, along with improving our communication about what we are doing and when.






Every council decision made is now against the backdrop of **Local Government Reorganisation** (LGR) and Devolution since, just over a year ago, the government produced a white paper on local government reform. The first part of Government's programme is LGR, which affects counties like ours which operate under a two-tier system of District and County. All such councils are set to be abolished and, in their place, new unitary authorities. Councils don't get to choose what the new unitary authority will look like in terms of geography – Government will make that decision – but all affected councils were invited to submit a proposal. There are three proposals on the table for Oxfordshire. We're still waiting for more information from Government on the direction for Oxfordshire and we expect news from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government before this summer's recess








What this means to residents in terms of the next local elections in 2027 is that we expect to be voting for a Shadow Authority – ie the councillors who will ultimately replace District and County councillors in 2028.

For councils' "business as usual", very few commitments can be made which take us beyond the next two years. This will inevitably present challenges. We want to be a council that get things done and leaves strong legacies. However, whichever direction Government chooses for our county, it's important that residents experience a smooth transition, and we are committed to working constructively on the process in order to achieve that.

OCC is also currently working on Government's Schools white paper and their NHS white paper, both of which councils will be instrumental in delivering, so this really is an absolutely unprecedented period for local government.

The past year has also seen some positive news and developments for OCC. We produced a **balanced budget** in February 2026 which included the following:

-  £3.2m for drainage and gully clearing – reducing flooding and making roads safer, addressing years of neglect and decline.
-  Another record roads budget – more highway gangs, more machinery, and extra investment to fix potholes faster.
-  Better, fairer public transport – protecting free Park & Ride, expanding services, and keeping MyBus youth fares affordable.
-  Investing in children & Early Years
 - * £500k/year for the Early Years Strategy
 - * £200k/year for young people's mental health & wellbeing
 - * £100k/year to expand the Family Nurse Partnership
-  £100k more for mental health prevention – helping people stay well, not just get help when they're already struggling.

-  Protecting vital services – maintaining funding for smoking cessation and substance use support.
-  £2m boost to S106 schemes – getting local community projects delivered faster in towns and villages.
-  Backing a greener future – fully funding our council-run tree nursery to support greener transport and environmental projects.
-  Investing in town & city centres – public realm improvements to make our high streets safer and more welcoming.
-  £1m more for Educational Psychologists – speeding up EHCNA assessments so children can get the support they need.
-  £2m extra for Home-to-School Transport (after £1.2m savings) – keeping children getting to school safely and reliably.
-  £800k to strengthen SEND casework – giving families better, faster support through complex systems.

On **SEND services**, we recently received news that the government has lifted the improvement notice for services for children and young people with SEND. The secretary of state noted that Oxfordshire’s local area partnership has strengthened how the views of young people with SEND (as well as parents and carers) are gathered and used in strategic planning. There have been improvements in communication and information sharing across the partnership, including monitoring the impact of the partnership’s actions and enhanced timeliness of education and health care plans (EHCPs). The secretary of state also acknowledged significant progress in jointly commissioning services and reducing waiting times for critical support.

A public consultation on **Fire & Rescue Services** took place Oct 25 – Jan 26. The main proposal in the consultation was to address ongoing challenges with fire engine availability during the daytime, when demand and risk are highest. As part of this, the consultation explored proposals to improve daytime fire and emergency response cover across Oxfordshire. However residents’ feedback made it clear how important local fire stations are, with communities showing strong support for retaining them. It was therefore recently announced that no fire station closures are now being recommended. For our most local fire station – Thame - the proposal to remove the second fire engine has been withdrawn. This proposal was originally put forward based on low availability of crews and because the vehicle had been attending less than 20 incidents a year.

Work will continue to identify how Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service can deliver its key objectives of improved first response times, increased daytime cover, stronger service resilience, and an increased amount of fire prevention work. Further engagement with employees and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) will take place to help shape how proposals could work in practice.

2026 has also seen the introduction of a **recycling centre booking system**. This was introduced partly to gather important data on site use, and also because Oxfordshire encountered problems with residents of neighbouring counties using our centres (which we previously didn’t charge them for), while those neighbouring counties were still charging Oxfordshire residents to use their sites. The new booking system has helped level the playing field in this sense, but I’m very aware that there have been teething problems with the system locally. I have been engaging with officers about any issues brought to my attention and will continue to do so. It’s also important to remember that the booking system remains under review.

Locally, I've responded to and worked with residents and parish councils on health and welfare matters, school places, traffic and highways, flooding and drainage, bus services, grant funding, congestion charge permit queries and much more - details of which I often include in my monthly reports – and I have visited some fabulous community organisations. I have also learned a great deal through my committee commitments at County Hall, in the areas of education & young people, health, and adults' services. Working as a councillor is my full-time commitment and I hope I am always approachable, responsive and tenacious. It is my job to represent you and I take this responsibility very seriously. If there's anything about OCC that you'd like information about, or if I can be of assistance to you in any way, you are always very welcome to get in touch with me.