



County Councillor Report
Chalgrove & Thame West Division
May/June 2026

Cllr Judith Edwards
Cabinet Member for Local Government
Reorganisation & Human Resources

Personal news

I'm very much back and functioning as a councillor again, but I should flag that ongoing preventative treatment continues to knock my stamina and may do for some weeks to come. As a result, I need to be careful about how I use my energy and evening meetings are particularly difficult from that respect. For the next few weeks, I will probably only be able to attend a meeting of a parish or town council if there's a really pressing issue and it can't be managed through email or a phone or video call. I'm really sorry about this, but it can't be helped.

Oxfordshire News

Local Government Reorganisation

You'll have seen that we finally received a "minded-to" decision from the Secretary of State in mid-July and that the preferred option is a **3 Unitary Authority model**. I'm personally deeply disappointed about this because this option was the most complicated as a piece of organisational redesign, the most expensive (with three sets of councillors and officers) and the one that is least straightforward to explain to residents.

However, while I and OCC colleagues continue to protest to the government about this, alongside our MP, Freddie van Mierlo, Oxfordshire County Council is getting on with the job of preparing for the new authorities. We have most recently submitted our proposals to the Secretary of State for election arrangements and are now awaiting the proposed Statutory Changes Order (SCO) which will confirm these details. I will continue to share as much information as I can about this as the situation develops.

The SCO is expected to be issued officially early in the New Year, with a view to holding elections to the shadow authorities in May 2027. The new councils will focus on their constitutional and business arrangements for the first few months, while the existing councils continue to run existing services. The transition to the new authorities will take place at midnight on 1st April 2028 (vesting day) when the new authorities and councillors officially take over.

So, for the next two years, OCC remains in charge of all the existing services, and you should see no change in how things are delivered. Please do send me any questions that you may have about this.

The positive part of this process is that unitary government gives a much better opportunity to connect with communities through providing a single point of access. There are also opportunities to give more responsibility to communities to look after issues themselves. I hope to share more about this in the next few months.

Oxfordshire is leading the way on climate action

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges we face, but it is also an opportunity to create a cleaner, healthier and more resilient Oxfordshire. As a council, we are already taking action. We are leading the way on clean transport with one of the country's largest electric bus fleets and nationally recognised progress on improving air quality. This was highlighted in a recent article in [Local Government Chronicle](#).

We're helping residents cut carbon emissions and energy bills through the [Warm Homes: Local Grant programme](#), which provides eligible households with free improvements such as insulation, solar panels and heat pumps. We're also ensuring communities can benefit from the transition to renewable energy, exploring ways for [communities hosting major projects](#) to share in the rewards through community payments and ownership opportunities. We are reducing our own emissions too, becoming the first local authority in England to introduce a dual-fuel hydrogen and hydrotreated vegetable oil highways maintenance vehicle.

Alongside this, our [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) will help restore habitats, improve resilience to flooding and support nature's recovery, while our [Quiet Lanes](#) programme will make rural roads safer and more attractive for walking, wheeling, cycling and horse riding. There is still more to do, but Oxfordshire is showing that climate action can reduce emissions, protect nature, lower costs and improve quality of life.

Traffic filters to replace congestion charge scheme

From Monday 28 September the traffic filters trial will replace the temporary congestion charge. Car drivers will no longer have the option to pay the £5 charge. For most people, their congestion charge permit will automatically become a traffic filters permit. They will not need to reapply.

The temporary congestion charge was introduced as a short-term measure to help manage congestion until the traffic filter trial could begin. The Botley Road closure meant we had to delay the trial, which aims to further reduce congestion and pollution, improve bus services and make cycling safer. With Botley Road re-opening on the 20 September, we can now move forward with the planned traffic filter trial.

Oxford needs to reduce the number of cars on its roads to thrive. You want a city where your journey is quicker, more connected, more flexible and more reliable. The traffic filters trial is just one of the ways we're making it happen.

By further reducing the amount of car traffic, we can improve public transport options and provide more travel connections locally, giving you more choice about how and when you choose to use them. [For more information about how this scheme will work, click here.](#)

Free electric blanket checks for residents

Residents are being encouraged to take up the offer of a free electric blanket check, part of Oxfordshire County Council's programme to ensure everyone is safe, as well as warm, this winter.

As electric blanket tests are normally very popular, they must be booked in advance to be guaranteed. Of the 920 electric blankets tested at last year's events, 338 failed safety assessments - a failure rate of 36.7 per cent, which is an increase from the previous year.

Sessions will be held at locations across the county. The full address and a specific time slot will be provided at time of booking. Local ones to us will be Monday 21 September in Thame, Tuesday 22nd September in Rose Hill, Oxford; Friday 25th September in Abingdon, Monday 5th October in Didcot, or Tuesday 6th October in Headington.

Appointments can be booked by visiting [electric blanket testing](#), calling 01865 895999 (option three) or emailing duty.officer@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Useful Links

[Roadworks around the county](#)

[Apply for a congestion charge permit](#)

[Report a pothole](#)

*****GRANTS AND COST OF LIVING*****

Hardship fund: OCC's hardship fund (Resident Support Scheme) was launched in June. Phone: 01865 804171

Home Upgrade Grants: OCC & its partner AgilityEco is reaching out directly to households who will qualify to benefit from Home Upgrade Grants (to improve energy efficiency for 'off grid' homes)

Community Capacity Grants: The Community Capacity Fund will open for grant applications from 6th September. Grants of between £5.000 and £20.000 are funded

by OCC and applications processed by Oxfordshire Community Foundation. Grants are given to projects that “support people to live well in their community, remaining fit and healthy for as long as possible”

Councillor Priority Grant: I still have some grant remaining in my pot, so please do get in touch if there's a great local project that needs some additional resources. I have up to £5,000 available.

The fund is open to a wide variety of organisations. Organisations must have a committee and a constitution or appropriate rules setting out the organisations aims and objectives. Examples of organisations who would be eligible:

- Registered charities
- Not for profit companies (examples include Community Interest Companies, Charitable Incorporated Organisations)
- Constituted community or voluntary groups
- Non-constituted community or voluntary groups
- Town/parish councils and parish meetings
- Schools (academy and local authority maintained)
- Parent Teacher Associations

All projects must address a recognised need in local communities in Oxfordshire. The funding must be project based with anticipated timescales and a breakdown of costs. Projects will need to be completed by the end of the 2026-27 financial year (31 March 2027).