

Oxfordshire

Area Assessment

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oneplace

for an independent overview
of local public services

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Oxfordshire at a glance

This independent assessment by six inspectorates sets out how well local public services are tackling the major issues in Oxfordshire. It says how well they are delivering better results for local people and how likely these are to improve in future. If, and only if, our assessment shows that the following special circumstances are met in relation to a major issue, we use flags to highlight our judgements. We use a green flag to highlight where others can learn from outstanding achievements or improvements or an innovation that has very promising prospects of success. We use a red flag to highlight where we have significant concerns about results and future prospects that are not being tackled adequately. This means that local partners need to do something more or different to improve these prospects.

Green flags - exceptional performance or innovation that others can learn from

No green flags have been identified for Oxfordshire

Red flags - significant concerns, action needed

No red flags have been identified for Oxfordshire

The local area

Oxfordshire is the most rural of South East counties. Over three-quarters of the land is devoted to agriculture. The city of Oxford is a major tourist attraction with its rich heritage and University.

Around 635,000 people live in the area with one in two people living in communities of less than 10,000. The population is predicted to increase rapidly over the next ten years. Oxford and central Oxfordshire are classed as 'diamonds for growth' - areas in the South East that are expected to deliver significant economic and housing growth.

Oxfordshire has strong links to London and the Midlands, as well as west to the Cotswolds and along the M4 corridor. It is generally prosperous. Economic prosperity and the quality of the environment make Oxfordshire an attractive place in which to live and work. However there are pockets of relative deprivation - in places like Oxford and Banbury.

The next section tells you how Oxfordshire's public services are doing in each of their local priority areas.

How is Oxfordshire doing?

Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation

Oxfordshire residents are generally well off and in good health. But there are some parts of the county where people's health and quality of life is not as good. The well being of large numbers of children in Oxford city is poor, in stark contrast to the quality of life enjoyed by children living in more rural districts.

The Council and its partners have agreed a clearer focus on breaking the cycle of deprivation in the worst affected areas of Banbury and Oxford. Joint public service plans between local government, police and health are emerging. But the pace of action needs to quicken and the level of financial investment grow, to reflect and improve the long-standing needs of local people.

Partners are working well together to make it easier for people living in rural parts of the county to get the services and support they need.

Environment and climate change

Although Oxfordshire is generally clean and well kept. Local people in the Vale of White Horse and Oxford City are less satisfied with the cleanliness of their local area than they have been in the past.

Oxfordshire is making good progress to protect the environment for future generations. Households right across the county are producing less waste but nearly 60 per cent of waste was still dumped in the ground. Partners are addressing this.

Councils are working well to protect the environment by reducing carbon emissions. Oxford City Council has been commended by the Carbon Trust as an example of how local councils can support local people and businesses to reduce energy.

Healthy and Thriving Communities

Partners are working well together to improve the health and well being of residents. But partners recognise that too many people go into hospital when this could have been avoided and are working together to tackle this.

Oxfordshire's children are generally healthy and partners work well together to keep them safe. Children are being kept safer through better systems in Social Services that mean that children at risk or in need of help are identified faster. But there are still some big issues for partners to address. Around 14,500 children are living in poverty in Oxfordshire with just under one in four of these living in Oxford.

People in Oxfordshire receive good social care services. Services work well to help people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable adults find jobs. More needs to be done to improve adult safeguarding.

Crime is generally low across the county and most of the districts have less crime than most parts of the South East. Fear of crime is still high among a lot of people. Partners are working together to improve understanding about the true level of crime and to reassure people that the county is a safe place to live. Partners work well together to keep young people out of trouble.

Residents in Oxfordshire are very active in their communities. They give a lot of voluntary support to local activities and help in making decisions that affect their local area.

Value For Money

Overall, people in Oxfordshire get good value for money from their public services. Across the County user consultation is being used to inform priorities. The result is improving focus of services onto the areas that matter to citizens.

In some parts of the county, local people pay much less council tax than people in other parts of the country, but at the same time, many of the services they receive are above average. All councils in Oxfordshire work well to see how they can cut costs by doing things differently, such as joining up services and making better use of technology. For example, Oxford City Council, being higher spending than other councils in Oxfordshire, has reduced the amount of money it spends by a quarter in the last two years. This is one of the biggest cost reductions made by any local council in the country. Likewise at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre their cost reduction programme has brought the trust to break even over a couple of years. The Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust has strengthened its communications so that broad feedback is obtained from a range of sources including hard to reach groups and through a variety of methods such as patient panels. This feedback is then used to inform service redesign.

World Class Economy

Partners are working more closely together to provide more houses, jobs and roads. This is important because of the need to deliver high growth to meet local and regional needs. Oxfordshire has performed well in recent years to deliver more new homes and new affordable homes, but needs to do this consistently across all district areas. This helps support what residents see as the third most important factor in making an area a good place to live.

Oxfordshire is prosperous compared with many parts of the country and local partners are working well to make sure that the area remains so despite the economic downturn. In the south of the county, local councils are working with businesses and the government to plan for new science based industries and research establishments. More children in Oxfordshire are doing well at school than in the past. However partners need to work better together so that young people get the right opportunities to get the skills and qualifications that they need.

More needs to be done through regional and national schemes to improve Oxfordshire's roads, especially the A34. This is important to keep a strategic route moving and to deal with congestion that is a high local concern.

Oxfordshire responded well to the summer floods in 2007 and 2008 and partners have since worked hard to help reduce the risk of flooding and to make sure that they are able to respond even quicker and more effectively in the future.

About Oxfordshire

A recent survey shows that in Oxfordshire 87 per cent of people are satisfied with their immediate local area as a place to live. This is higher than the average for similar areas and higher than the national average of 81 per cent.

Oxfordshire is a relatively large county area in the South East. Over three-quarters of the land is devoted to agriculture and two fifths is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, notably the Cotswolds, the Chilterns and the Berkshire Downs. The city of Oxford is a major tourist attraction with its rich heritage and University.

Around 635,000 people live in the area with one in two people living in communities of less than 10,000. The population is predicted to increase rapidly over the next ten years. Oxford and central Oxfordshire are classed as 'diamonds for growth' - areas in the South East that are expected to deliver significant economic and housing growth. The population is slightly younger than regional and national averages. This is because of the 30,000 or so students in further and higher education. The proportion of older people is relatively low.

Oxfordshire has strong links to London and the Midlands, as well as west to the Cotswolds and along the M4 corridor. It is generally prosperous and has an exceptional concentration of research and development companies linked to universities, hospitals and medical research.

Economic prosperity and the quality of the environment make Oxfordshire an attractive place in which to live and work. However there are pockets of relative deprivation - in places like Oxford and Banbury- where residents have lower wages and low skills, poorer housing and health and where young people do not fulfil their potential at school.

How well do priorities for Oxfordshire express community needs and aspirations?

Local public services are working together to address the key issues for the area that can't be tackled alone. For example, partners recognise that there is a better chance of improving health, education, housing and poverty in deprived wards in Oxford and Banbury if they work together to tackle these issues as a whole, rather than individually. Similarly, working together to make sure young people do well at school and get the skills that businesses need, will help Oxfordshire achieve its ambition of delivering a world class economy.

The key issues that partners have chosen to tackle in Oxfordshire are based on a good understanding of what local people think are important and robust

data that shows for example, how the area is growing, the diversity and increasingly older population and the challenges for the future.

This understanding has informed the Sustainable Community strategy, 'Oxfordshire 2030' and the key targets within it. This is a long term plan that sets out how the Oxfordshire councils and key partners will work together to make sure that it improves the area. There is an emphasis on tackling social problems such as crime, antisocial behaviour and drug related issues, which are concentrated in Oxford. The Plan also generally reflects the key issues that the five district councils think are specifically important to their areas, such as reducing traffic congestion, increasing activities for teenagers, affordable housing, and reducing crime.

Breaking the Cycle of Deprivation

General

Oxfordshire residents are generally well off and in good health. But there are some parts of the county where people's health and quality of life is not as good. For example, people living in the poorest parts of Oxford and Banbury can expect to live at least 15 years less than those in the county's wealthiest areas and they are more likely to have poor education, skills, wages and housing. The well being of children in Oxford City is poor, in stark contrast to the quality of life enjoyed by children living in West Oxfordshire, South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds living in Oxford are over represented in lower paid jobs.

The Council and its partners have agreed a clearer focus on breaking the cycle of deprivation in the worst affected areas of Banbury and Oxford. Regeneration of some of the poorest parts of Oxford has already helped provide better housing, jobs and facilities and Cherwell and Oxford City District Councils are working with the PCT to help people in poorer areas stay healthy. However the need is great.

In response, joint public service plans between local government, police and health are emerging. But the pace of action needs to quicken and the level of financial investment grow, to reflect and improve the long-standing needs of local people. Two million pounds of government reward grant is available, but local public services have not yet significantly changed their priorities and mainstream spending plans to meet the long-standing local need of breaking the cycle of deprivation. We recognise that some measures of success will take years to unfold but we will look to report next year on the quality of political and managerial leadership, investment and priorities and action on the ground.

Educational Achievement

Like many parts of the country, some vulnerable children and young people do not do as well at school. This is getting better, but partners recognise that more can be done and they are targeting actions to help these children fulfil their potential better.

Under 18 conception rates

Too many teenagers in Oxford are getting pregnant. Numbers are much higher than in other areas, and although there are fewer pregnancies than in the past, the numbers are not falling as fast as they are elsewhere. Partners are working with teenagers in the poorer parts of the county to help bring numbers down, but they have some way to go to meet Oxfordshire's target for reducing teenage pregnancies by 2010.

Rural

Partners are working well together to make it easier for people living in rural parts of the county to get the services and support they need. For example, West Oxfordshire has worked with partners to improve facilities for young people by providing a mobile skateboard park and mobile cinema. Cherwell Council has installed 'Linkpoints' in some rural parts of the district so that people can pay bills and get the information they need without having to get to the Council's main offices. These actions are important because some people in the more rural areas can feel isolated, especially if they haven't got a car.

Oxfordshire is well placed to continue to improve the quality of life in rural areas. Partnerships between West Oxfordshire and Cherwell and the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire councils have won European Union money so that they can improve things in the villages, such as supporting shops and rural businesses. Also, partners are working together directly with elderly people in rural communities to find out what services they need and how they should be provided. For example, this work discovered that some elderly people in West Oxfordshire need better transport. Plans are now being developed to address this. This is important because some residents living in remote rural areas of West Oxfordshire have further to travel to reach local facilities than any others in the South East.

Environment and climate change

Cleanliness

Although Oxfordshire is generally clean and well kept, not all local councils are doing as well as they planned. In most parts of the county, graffiti, fly posting and fly tipping is dealt with well and abandoned cars are taken away quickly. But more needs to be done to reduce litter and deal with dirty kerbsides in the Vale, West Oxfordshire and Oxford City, to meet the standards that the county as a whole has set for itself. This is important because local people in the Vale and Oxford City are less satisfied with the cleanliness of their local area than they have been in the past. Councils are taking action to improve in this area and are now monitoring performance across the whole of the county.

Waste

Oxfordshire is making good progress to protect the environment for future generations. Households right across the county are producing less waste and recycling more and recycling and composting rates have increased faster than expected. But nearly 60 per cent of waste was still dumped in the ground in 2008/09 and Oxfordshire needs to work harder to reduce this. Local data

shows that South Oxfordshire has achieved a marked improvement in supporting recycling rates as a result of a new contract. Other areas have good plans as well. For example, from next year, Oxford City, West Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse are market testing their contracts for dealing with waste in order to improve value for money and make it easier for people to recycle more. Also, plans are being agreed for an incinerator and waste treatment solution in the county. The less waste that is dumped, the better this is for the environment. These actions are important because if Oxfordshire doesn't cut down the amount of waste it sends to landfill, it will be fined by the government.

Carbon Reduction

Councils are working well to protect the environment by reducing carbon emissions. The County Council and Oxford City council have made good progress in reducing their carbon footprint, and Oxford City Council has been commended by the Carbon Trust as an example of how local councils can support local people and businesses to reduce energy. It is also the first council in England and Wales to agree to have wind turbines on its land. All Oxfordshire councils have met their targets to make sure that they are prepared to tackle climate change and have plans in place to reduce emissions in future years. This is important because people in Oxfordshire use more electricity and gas than those in similar parts of the country and overall carbon emissions throughout the county are high. We will report next year on how well targets are being met.

Healthy and Thriving Communities

Overall health

Partners are working well together to improve the health and well being of residents, and people in Oxfordshire are generally healthy. Men and women live longer than the national average and fewer people die at an early age from heart disease, stroke or cancer. Partners are clearly focused on helping people to be healthy and stay independent to keep them out of hospital. They join up services and share money to do this. But partners recognise that too many people go into hospital when this could have been avoided and are working together to tackle this.

Partners are improving health and reducing early deaths by helping more people quit smoking. But the LSP has only recently put plans in place to reduce the harm caused to people through drinking alcohol. Partners need to progress this, particularly given the high number of people in Oxford City with poor health caused by alcohol.

Delayed Transfers of Care

Oxfordshire has made some important and significant improvements to address problems with people leaving hospital when they are well enough to do so. But numbers are still high compared with other areas and more needs to be done so that people have the support they need to return home and beds are freed up for those that need them. The Council needs to continue to work closely with health and strategic partners to reduce this further.

Adult Social Care and Independent Living

People in Oxfordshire get generally good social care services. Partners work well together to share money and to make sure that all parts of the district are working to achieve the targets agreed for Oxfordshire as a whole. But more needs to be done so that older people get a say in how services are provided for them. Services work well to help people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable adults find jobs.

A recent inspection by the Care Quality Commission found that some of the processes to keep adults safe need to be improved. The rate of safeguarding referrals about older people had increased from 2007/08; however, for people with learning disabilities, people with physical disabilities, people with mental health needs, and people who use drug services the rates of safeguarding referrals were still significantly below the rates in the average of similar councils. This indicates that there is a risk of under-reporting of incidents.

The Council and the NHS together need to be more effective at helping people live independently through rehabilitation and intermediate care. However more people are helped to live at home through the use of technology which is providing reassurance for them and their carers.

Children's Health and safeguarding

Oxfordshire's children are generally healthy and partners work well together to keep them safe. Large numbers of children take part in PE and sport and partners work well to stop children getting overweight. Over 5000 children a year are being educated about the dangers in their homes and outside through the Junior Citizen Programme run in partnership by the county's Fire and Rescue Service. Children are being kept safer through better systems in Social Services that mean that children at risk or in need of help are identified faster. But there are still some big issues for partners to address. Around 14,500 children are living in poverty in Oxfordshire with just under one in four of these living in Oxford. These children have worse health than other children of the same age. Also too many children are admitted to hospital with injuries. Work through the children's trust is focused on tackling main areas of concern in Oxfordshire primarily Oxford, Banbury and Abingdon. Partners need to continue to focus on improving tackling child poverty, raising family aspirations, improving attainment and children's health and well being.

Supported Housing

Partners are helping vulnerable people get the type of housing they need. For example, the Oxfordshire Joint Housing Team works across the county to tackle and prevent homelessness among young people and vulnerable families. The team brings together staff from the County Council, City and district councils and the voluntary sector and has been appointed a Regional Centre of Excellence for Youth Homelessness recognising how well partners work together. A range of housing has been provided across Oxfordshire for vulnerable people, such as the Ovens House in Witney, that provides supported living for six people with learning difficulties, Foyer housing in Cherwell and the Vale of White Horse that helps homeless young people develop skills, and services right across the county that support elderly people to live independently. However the area does not have enough housing that is

suitable for young people leaving care and young offenders. Unfortunately, the area has not delivered on its plan for additional extra care housing in the last year and this has affected the number of people helped to live independently and in a better environment. The County Council needs to ensure that this shortfall is addressed.

Community Cohesion

People like living in Oxfordshire and most feel that different communities get on well together. But there are differences depending on people's age and where they live. Older residents in Oxford are much less positive about their home and area, while Cherwell's residents are less positive about how well people from different backgrounds get on together. Many people in Oxford and Cherwell feel they don't belong where they live. Councils are aware of this, and they are working with local communities to try to understand people's concerns. We will look more closely next year to see what partners have done to help communities get on better together.

Overall Crime

Oxfordshire is a safe place to live. Crime is generally low across the county and most of the districts have less crime than most parts of the South East. In 2008/09 fewer people suffered violent crimes in Oxfordshire and fewer people had their cars stolen. But overall crime increased by 4 per cent in Oxford City, largely as a result of more burglaries and car thefts. Oxford City Crime and Disorder Partnership's performance is around the average when compared with other similar areas. Although local people are confident that their concerns about crime are understood and dealt with, fear of crime is still high amongst a lot of people. Partners are working together to improve understanding about the true level of crime and to reassure people that the county is a safe place to live.

Youth Offending

Partners work well together to keep young people out of trouble. The number of young people committing crimes for the first time more than halved in 2008/09. Far fewer young people re-offended than in the past, but the numbers are still average compared to other areas. Partners are working to improve how they can get young people involved in more positive activities to stop them re-offending and reduce numbers further.

Drugs and Alcohol

Oxfordshire residents don't think that anti-social behaviour and drug use is a big problem compared with other parts of England. But the reality is that too many people are binge drinking and causing problems in Oxford City. Partners have got plans in place to try to stop this and we will look more closely at how successful these have been next year.

One scheme that is having some impact is the Nightsafe scheme. This operates in Oxford City centre and East Oxford and in other parts of the district such as Abingdon, Oxford, Henley and Witney. This involves a range of partners, such as local councils, the police and fire and rescue service working with local pub, restaurant and club owners to make towns safer places to be

at night. The campaign also targets young people in schools to highlight the dangers of alcohol and drugs. In some parts of the county, this has contributed to fewer young people committing crimes and drinking alcohol in public places. In Oxfordshire, people with drug problems get good treatment and more people who use drugs are benefiting from being in effective treatment programmes as a result of increased engagement. The area also recognises that it needs to increase access to those people needing drug treatment and is developing plans to achieve this.

Volunteering and Engagement

Residents in Oxfordshire are very active in their communities. They give a lot of voluntary support to local activities and help in making decisions that affect their local area. This is particularly the case in South Oxfordshire where it is estimated that a third of the population are involved in some form of voluntary work. High numbers of adults take part in sport and active recreation, visit museums and galleries and get involved in the arts.

Value For Money

Overall, people in Oxfordshire get good value for money from their public services. Across the county user consultation is being used to inform priorities. The result is improving the focus of services onto the areas that matter to citizens.

In some parts of the county, local people pay much less council tax than people in other parts of the country, but at the same time, many of the services they receive are above average. All councils in Oxfordshire work well to see how they can cut costs by doing things differently, such as joining up services and making better use of technology. For example, Oxford City Council, being higher spending than other councils in Oxfordshire, has reduced the amount of money it spends by a quarter in the last two years. This is one of the biggest cost reductions made by any local council in the country. Likewise at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre its cost reduction programme has helped the Trust to break even over the last couple of years. The Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust has strengthened its communications so that broad feedback is obtained from a range of sources including hard to reach groups and through a variety of methods such as patient panels. This feedback is then used to inform service redesign.

World Class Economy

Sustainable Balance

Partners are working more closely together to provide more houses, jobs and roads. This is important because Oxfordshire's population and economy has grown quickly in recent years. But partners need to do more to make sure there are enough affordable homes, roads and people with the right skills to meet businesses' need. There is now better leadership and commitment from local partners to work together to deal with these issues. This will help to ensure that Oxfordshire manages its growth in a more balanced way.

One good example of this is the partnership work between Cherwell District Council and the County Council to resist the government's plans for a 15,000 home eco development at Weston Otmoor. The alternative proposal put forward by both councils will create a smaller, more environmentally friendly community of 5,000 new homes. This is supported by plans for jobs, transport and local facilities and allows for this part of the county to grow at a rate that is more appropriate for the area. Another is the West End Partnership in Oxford City where the County and City Council's are working with government agencies using 'new growth point money' with plans to deliver 800 houses, shops, offices and hotels, cultural activities in an accessible location.

General Housing

Oxfordshire has performed well in recent years to deliver more new homes and new affordable homes. Oxford City and West Oxfordshire councils have performed particularly well, and this has helped the county as a whole build more homes than the government expected for the area. But some areas have not performed so well. Some overall house building targets have not been met in South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse for a number of years. These councils, the County Council and their partners need to make sure that barriers to development are removed and they do all they reasonably can to get house building moving when the economy picks up.

Affordable housing

Oxfordshire councils are delivering high numbers of affordable homes. This helps support what residents see as the third most important factor in making an area a good place to live. In 2008/09 Oxfordshire met its target of providing over 735 new affordable homes across the county. Overall, between 2001 and 2008 around 33 per cent of new housing built across the county has been affordable - 5,690 homes. This includes a good range of different types of housing, such as shared ownership and homes for people who need support. The partnership has lobbied effectively in getting £4 million to build more affordable social housing in Oxford city. This is important because house prices in Oxfordshire are amongst the highest in the country so without affordable housing, many people would not be able to live and work in the county.

More affordable homes need to be built in rural areas of Oxfordshire to meet local need as house prices in these areas can be particularly high. We will report further on how well councils are helping to make this happen next year.

Employment and Tackling the Recession

Oxfordshire is prosperous compared with many parts of the country and local partners are working well to make sure that the area remains so despite the economic downturn. Partners are helping local people and businesses deal with the recession. For example, Cherwell District Council has launched job clubs in Banbury and Bicester, drawing together services and support under one roof. This approach was the first of its kind in the county and the clubs have helped over 1,000 job seekers get support, training or advice. The City and County Council's work with the South East England Development Agency has helped people who had lost their jobs at BMW find new ones and made sure that government money came to Oxford to help develop the electric

mini. This has boosted demand and led to staff being re-employed. Councils are supporting the local economy by buying goods and services from local businesses and paying for these quicker. Free parking across West Oxfordshire and at the Oxford City's Park and Rides helps to reduce congestion and ease pollution.

In the south of the county, local councils are working with businesses and the government to plan for new science based industries and research establishments. Linked to new housing and with more people being trained so they have the right skills, Oxfordshire is well placed to come out of the recession having maintained its prosperity.

Education achievement and Skills

More children in Oxfordshire are doing well at school than in the past, but standards are still not as high as in similar parts of the country and not enough young people are in further education, working or on training courses. Partners need to work better together so that young people get the right opportunities to get the skills and qualifications that they need to get employment and that the training available gives them the skills that local businesses want. This is particularly important in the case of people living in the more deprived parts of Oxfordshire to help raise levels of prosperity. The Oxfordshire Learning and Skills Partnership has set aside £900,000 for skills and training and we will report next year on how successfully this money has been used.

Tackling Traffic Congestion

Better public transport is benefiting local people, reducing traffic on the roads and helping to reduce pollution. More people are using the bus, walking and cycling and better train routes and more regular services are also encouraging people not to use their cars. Satisfaction with public transport is high in most areas of Oxfordshire. But in 2008/09 not as many children walked or cycled to school and a local target was missed. More needs to be done with schools to get more children walking and cycling. Despite more public transport trips, roads remain congested especially around Oxford and the market towns. More needs to be done through regional and national schemes to improve Oxfordshire's roads, especially the A34. This is important to keep a strategic route moving and to deal with congestion that is a high local concern.

Flooding

Oxfordshire responded well to the summer floods in 2007 and 2008 and partners have since worked hard to help reduce the risk of flooding and to make sure that they are able to respond even quicker and more effectively in the future. The Fire and Rescue Service now has better equipment, have trained all fire fighters in water incidents and has better plans so that staff and equipment can be moved quickly to where it is needed most. Work has been carried out across the county to identify those areas most at risk of flooding and what needs to be done and some local schemes such as defences at Hinksey and Osney Island in Oxford are in place. Plans for improvements in West Oxford and Banbury are well advanced with Cherwell showing good commitment in setting aside £2million of tax payers money to support the Banbury scheme. But while local schemes are helpful, significant

multi million pound investment is required by the Environment Agency and money is not likely to be available for some time.

CAA looks at how well local public services, working together, are meeting the needs of the people they serve. It's a joint assessment made by a group of independent watchdogs about the performance of local public services, and how likely they are to meet local priorities. From 9 December you will find the results of Comprehensive Area Assessment on the Oneplace website - <http://oneplace.direct.gov.uk/>

Alternative formats - If you require a copy of PDF documents in this site in large print, in Braille, on tape, or in a language other than English, please call: 0844 798 7070

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