



Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Performance Annual Report 2025/2026

A modern
council
inspiring and
enabling
positive, lasting





Foreword by Cllr McLean and Gordon Stewart

We are pleased to present Cherwell District Council's Annual Performance Report for 2025/26. This past year has both challenged and strengthened us. Against a demanding national and financial backdrop, the council has remained steadfast in its focus: delivering for its residents, protecting those most in need, and investing in the long-term future of our district. The progress set out in this report reflects not only what we have achieved, but also the collaboration, determination and shared sense of purpose that have made it possible

Across our four strategic priorities, we have continued to make meaningful progress. From supporting economic growth and helping local businesses adapt and thrive, to improving access to housing, strengthening community wellbeing and advancing our environmental ambitions, we have sought to turn ambition into tangible outcomes that residents can see and feel in their everyday lives.

We are particularly proud of the way in which our services, staff and partners have responded to ongoing pressure. Whether through delivering efficient, high-quality frontline services, supporting households with the cost of living, or driving forward our climate commitments, the council has remained focused on making a difference where it matters most.

This report also reflects a balanced and honest assessment of our performance. While most of our objectives have been met or are close to being met, we recognise that there remain areas requiring continued focus and improvement. We are committed to learning from this, strengthening delivery, and ensuring that we continue to provide value for money and high-quality services for our residents.

None of this would be possible without the dedication and professionalism of our staff, the commitment of our councillors, and the invaluable contribution of our partners and community organisations. Together, we have made real progress for Cherwell.

Our district has a bright future, which we can embrace with confidence. The foundations laid out over the past year place us in a strong position to respond to future challenges, embrace new opportunities and continue building a district where our communities can thrive.



Councillor Lesley McLean
Leader
Cherwell District Council



Gordon Stuart
Chief Executive,
Cherwell District Council



Our Priorities 2025/2026

Cherwell District Council is dedicated to inspiring and enabling positive, lasting change for our residents and communities. Our vision is to be a modern, forward-thinking council that embraces opportunities and addresses challenges with innovation and collaboration.

Our strategy focuses on what we aim to achieve for our residents and communities, driving continued progress through four vital priorities:



Economic prosperity

Create vibrant economic centres and thriving rural villages

Build an inclusive and green economy



Community leadership

Strengthen community collaboration and resilience

Promote health and wellbeing with a focus on inequality



Environmental stewardship

Safeguard the environment and promote biodiversity

Promote the circular economy of reduce, reuse and recycle to minimise waste



Quality housing and place making

Deliver sustainable and strategic development that meets Cherwell's needs now, and in the future

Achieve more high quality, secure, and affordable housing that caters for the diverse needs of our residents





Economic Prosperity

We want to foster vibrant economic centres alongside thriving rural villages across Cherwell, creating places that are active, welcoming and full of opportunity. By backing local businesses and encouraging innovation, we can build a strong and resilient economy that works for everyone. This future economy will be inclusive and green, offering opportunities for all residents while reducing environmental impact, and balancing growth with eco-friendly practices and green infrastructure to deliver lasting benefits for our communities.

Below some of our achievements around this priority:

Accelerating Local Development – Our proactive approach to funding has seen almost £1 million invested through a combination of council reserves and government grants to accelerate priority housing and regeneration projects, with the potential to unlock around 8,000 new homes. By strengthening collaboration with developers and local community partners, including through our Area Oversight Groups, we are addressing long-standing infrastructure constraints and supporting vital regeneration across our town centres. This work demonstrates the council's clear commitment to delivering much-needed homes and enabling high quality, sustainable growth across the district.

Supporting Small Businesses to Go Digital – During 2025/26 we delivered a comprehensive support programme to help eligible small and medium-sized businesses embrace digital ways of working. Running from April 2025 to March 2026, the scheme provided expert-led training to strengthen workforce skills, match-funded grants for new digital equipment and software, and tailored leadership development. Together, this support helped local manufacturers modernise their operations, improve productivity, reduce costs and compete more effectively in today's economy.

Cherwell Economic Forum – Held in February 2025 at Bicester Motion, our flagship business event brought together over 50 business leaders, policymakers, and community figures, hosting a collaborative platform, we facilitated networking and knowledge-sharing across diverse industries to foster long-term successful partnerships. Whilst keeping the council directly connected to the opportunities and challenges facing our local business landscape, helping us shape a more prosperous future for all.

Connecting Residents with Jobs and Skills – During 2025/26, a total of 484 residents were supported through programmes funded by national and regional growth funding. This included participation in employability support sessions delivered through the No Limits programme, as well as attendance at the Banbury Job Fair held at Castle Quay on 18 March 2026. Together, these activities helped residents improve their skills, access advice and connect with employment opportunities across the district.





Community Leadership

We want to build strong, united communities that are confident, resilient and well prepared to meet challenges and succeed. By working in partnership with residents, community groups and service providers, we will shape inclusive environments and practical solutions that work for everyone. At the same time, we are committed to improving health and wellbeing across Cherwell, with a particular focus on tackling inequality. Through close collaboration with healthcare and community partners, we will prioritise prevention, deliver targeted support where it is most needed, strengthen social connections and help ensure Cherwell is a healthier place in which all our residents can thrive.

Below some of our achievements around this priority:

Supporting Our Elders - Our targeted and proactive campaigns this year delivered a real boost for older residents, helping pension-aged households claim more than £400,000 in additional financial support. Through smart use of data and strong partnerships, including work with Age UK, we supported 116 residents to access pension credit and cost-of-living help, significantly increasing household incomes and wellbeing. The success of these campaigns highlights our efforts to ensure residents receive the support they are entitled to and can enjoy greater financial security.

Helping Young Minds Thrive - We started a pilot programme, funded with £55,000 from Oxfordshire County Council's public health team and delivered by Cherwell, aiming to help younger children feel happier and more confident at school. Running for a year in 15 local primary schools, the initiative focuses on pupils aged eight to 11 and offers fun, practical sessions to help them understand their feelings, manage stress and build resilience. With extra one-to-one help where needed and useful training for school staff, the programme is all about giving children the right support early on so they can enjoy school, feel supported and thrive both emotionally and academically.

Empowering Local Grassroots – Our latest round of the Household Support Fund, launched in November 2025, provided £55,000 in vital grants to local charities and community groups. By offering funding of up to £3,000 for resident-focused projects, we empowered these organisations to address the unique cost-of-living challenges within their own neighbourhoods. This initiative ensures that support is delivered by the people who know our communities best, fostering local resilience and collective wellbeing during difficult times.

Supporting School and Community Hubs – We extended our cost-of-living support in December 2025 by offering grants of up to £2,000 specifically for schools and community organisations in need of funding. Following a highly successful previous round where 14 out of 15 applicants were supported, this continued investment helps essential local hubs maintain their services and broaden their impact. Our commitment to these organisations ensures that vital resources remain accessible to our communities, strengthening the social fabric of the district.





Environmental Stewardship

We will protect our environment and strengthen biodiversity by implementing sustainable policies that preserve Cherwell's natural landscapes and wildlife, ensuring our ecosystems continue to thrive for future generations. Alongside this, we will champion a circular economy by promoting the principles of reduce, reuse and recycle, encouraging responsible consumption, minimising waste and extending the life of materials and products. Together, these actions will foster a strong culture of sustainability that supports both our communities and the natural environment upon which they depend.

Below some of our achievements around this priority:

Lowering our emissions – In 2025/26, we increased our electric-vehicle fleet to 15%, collecting 8.5 million containers while using 2% less fuel, and launching new services like coffee pod recycling, with 1.05 million pods collected this year. Contributing to cleaner streets, reduced emissions, and more efficient use of resources, helping to create a greener and healthier district.

New Climate Action plan – In 2025/26 a new Climate Action Plan was developed and presented to the Executive at the beginning of April 2026, reinforcing our commitment to reaching net zero by 2030. Building on the progress made since declaring the climate emergency in 2019. The plan sets out further actions to cut emissions from council buildings and vehicles through cleaner fuels, low-carbon heating and solar investment, while supporting district-wide action on energy efficiency, active travel, electric vehicles and biodiversity.

Improving Air Quality – This year we marked a noticeable improvement in air quality in a busy part of Bicester, Kings End and Queens Avenue, which has led to the agreement to remove its special monitoring designation after pollution levels have remained within national limits for several years. This progress reflects our sustained efforts such as better walking and cycling routes, green infrastructure planting and changes in traffic movement, alongside cleaner vehicles. While the area will continue to be closely monitored due to heavy traffic, the decision marks a positive step for residents' health and the local environment.

Biodiversity Duty Report – Our commitment to nature recovery was reinforced this year with the approval of our first Biodiversity Duty Report in March 2026; from community orchards to school farm visits and habitat protection for protected species, we are taking proactive steps to reverse nature depletion across the district in collaboration with a variety of partners. This initiative ensures that biodiversity is woven into all our decisions, helping to create more resilient green spaces that support both local wildlife and the mental wellbeing of our residents.





Quality Housing and Place Making

We are committed to delivering sustainable, well-planned development that meets Cherwell's needs now and, in the future, ensuring new homes are supported by essential services, strong transport links and community facilities. We will also increase the supply of high-quality, genuinely affordable housing across a range of tenures, helping residents from all walks of life find a secure place to call home.

Below some of our achievements around this priority:

Housing Benefits Efficiency – Over the year, we consistently met our speed of processing targets, with new claims brought into payment within an average of 12 days against a target of 18 days, 9 days less than the average for Southeast England. This strong performance has been supported by ongoing digital transformation, with over 40% of change of circumstance processes now fully or partially automated. Alongside system-led workflow improvements that streamline processes from start to finish, these changes have strengthened the service's resilience and responsiveness, helping to ensure smooth and reliable delivery even during periods of higher demand.

Improving Transitions from Temporary Housing – Our continued focus and proactive approach have delivered strong and encouraging results, with a sustained reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation, particularly in hotel placements, which have fallen by over 50%, from approximately 50 households at the start of the financial year to fewer than 25. Despite consistent demand for support, the service has successfully reduced overall numbers through effective policy improvements, a growing supply of high-quality self-contained accommodation, and a clear commitment to helping households move more quickly into settled homes. In the context of increasing national demand for temporary accommodation, Cherwell's positive downward trend represents a significant achievement and reflects the Council's dedication to delivering effective and responsive housing support for residents.

Supporting Our Most Vulnerable Residents – Our dedicated housing team was nationally recognised in May 2025 for its swift delivery of home adaptations, becoming one of the most responsive in the country. By significantly reducing the time it takes to implement vital changes like wet rooms and stairlifts, we have helped residents with disabilities maintain their independence and improve their quality of life. This high-performing service, active through 2025/26, exemplifies our commitment to ensuring that every resident has access to safe and suitable housing that meets their specific health and mobility needs.

Local Plan Submission – Our vision for sustainable growth achieved a major milestone this year as the Cherwell Local Plan Review 2042 was submitted for independent government examination. By meticulous planning for approximately 26,000 homes balanced with the protection of Cherwell's heritage and green spaces, we are providing a secure framework for future development. This rigorous process throughout 2025/26 ensures that we can meet our long-term housing needs while maintaining the unique character and biodiversity of our villages and towns.





More Than Movement: Changing Lives Together

This year our programmes have continued to support people across the area to be more active, improve wellbeing and feel more connected, delivering meaningful outcomes for families, young people and residents living with long-term health conditions.

Making a Real Difference for Families

You Move continues to show strong and meaningful outcomes, 52% of adult participants and 48% of children have increased their physical activity levels, with children moving an average of 153 additional minutes each week. Alongside this, 60% of families' reports improved mental wellbeing, demonstrating the programme's wider impact on everyday life.

For many families, You Move has removed barriers that previously prevented participation. One parent shared:

"My daughter has a disability that is improved by regular exercise, and she would not have been able to access sport in the way she has without You Move. It has completely changed her access to physical activity."

The value of this work is reflected in a social return on investment of £3.50 for every £1 spent, underlining both its human and economic benefit.

Supporting Young People Where They Learn and Live

The Youth Activators programme has created welcoming, positive spaces for young people, reaching 1,862 children and young people across 32 schools and 14 community settings. Delivered with Mind, this work has strengthened emotional wellbeing support and will see 15 Cherwell schools' pilot mental health provision and training from September 2026.

Helping People Stay Active, Independent and Connected

The Move Together programme continues to support residents living with long-term health conditions to become more active and feel better in themselves. During this period, 194 new participants joined the programme, with 58% increasing their activity levels and a reassuring 72% reporting improved mental wellbeing. This positive progress is also reducing pressure on local health services, with a 43% fall in GP appointments and a social return on investment of £418,000.

One participant reflected on the support they received:

"I'm incredibly grateful to Alison and the team for supporting me through a very difficult time after my husband passed away. Your steady encouragement during my hip recovery helped me regain my independence, and I will always value the support you've given me."

Looking Ahead

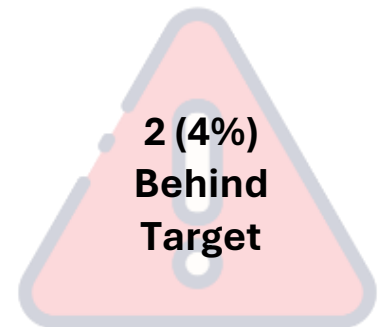
Across all programmes, the message is consistent: when delivered with care, understanding and a genuine commitment to inclusion, physical activity can transform lives. Whether supporting families, empowering young people, or helping residents maintain independence and wellbeing, this work shows that movement is about far more than exercise — it is about dignity, belonging and giving people the chance to thrive.





Performance Summary

The below summarises the progress we have made delivering against the activities, tasks and projects outlined in our vision and strategy under each of the four priorities. We use a Red – Amber – Green system, where green refers to a target wholly met, amber to a target narrowly missed and red to a target missed. For more information click [here](#).



Please note at the time of doing this report the data for the measure “Net Additional Housing Completions to meet Cherwell needs” is not available yet. An update will be provided within the Quarter 1 2026-27 report. The calculations above do not include that indicator; the missing measure represents 2% of the results.

In summary

Our performance at the end of 2025/26 presents a mixed but broadly stable picture, with the Council delivering the majority of its agreed objectives while a small number of areas continue to require attention. Most corporate and directorate key performance indicators were achieved or reported within tolerance, and nearly half of Annual Delivery Plan actions were fully delivered, with several others slightly behind target rather than significantly off-track. There were some notable service improvements during the year, including reductions in the use of hotel-based temporary accommodation, consistently strong Housing Benefit processing times, and an increased number of affordable homes delivered. A limited number of performance exceptions, particularly within planning-related measures, reflect historic pressures and external influences, though improvement activity is underway and early progress is evident. Overall, the year-end position indicates steady performance, sensible management of risk, and a clear understanding of where further focus will be required going into 2026/27.





How we spend your money?

The Council monitors its ongoing budget position monthly and the performance of the organisation on a quarterly basis to enable the Executive to make timely decisions on any changes that are required. Demonstrating with this robust process the Council it is fiscally responsible, making the most of every pound and providing value for money to our residents.

Here is where we spent our 2025/2026 funding and what services each directorate covers:

£0.935m - Place and Regeneration - The directorate oversees key place-shaping services, including Planning and Development Management, Regeneration and Economy, Biodiversity and Climate Resilience, and Property. Together, these services support sustainable growth, environmental stewardship and the effective management of land and assets to meet local priorities.

£9.791m - Resources - The directorate delivers core corporate services, including Finance, Customer Services, Digital and Innovation, Human Resources, Law and Governance, and Transformation, enabling efficient, well-governed and resident-focused operations across the organisation.

£9.265m - Neighbourhood Services - The directorate brings together Environmental Services, Regulatory Services and Community Safety, and Wellbeing and Housing to promote clean, safe and healthy neighbourhoods, support vulnerable residents, and ensure effective regulation and protection across the district.

£1.943m – Chief Executive Office - The directorate provides strategic coordination at the heart of the organisation, bringing together Communications and Marketing, Performance and Insight, the Executive Support Team and Policy Development, supporting effective leadership, clear communication, robust insight, effective performance monitoring and well-informed policy making across the council.

£3.811 – Executive Matters -

Where did our funding come from?

£0.512m came from government grants

£9.893m from council tax

£14.405m from business rates

£0.935m from New Homes Bonus

This adds up to **£25.745m** - our funding for 2025/2026





Engaging to Our Customers

Our Contact Centre figures

From April 2025 to March 2026, our friendly team stood shoulder to shoulder with our community through the current cost of living crisis, offering reassurance, understanding and practical support, through:

77,228 Phone calls

58,577 Emails processed

1008 Customer appointments

91% Customer satisfaction with overall experience

97% Customer Satisfaction-With Advisor

66% Of queries were resolved first time

Listening and Learning

Throughout the year, we delivered 23 consultations, providing valuable opportunities for residents to share their views and help shape our services. We remain committed to this approach and will continue to invite feedback on key matters, including budgets, new projects and service developments. Whether through formal consultations, engagement with local business organisations, or feedback submitted via our website, we are keen to understand what works well and where we can improve.

To participate in live consultations and sign up to notifications of future consultations, access <https://cherwell.citizenspace.com/> or email consultation@cherwell-dc.gov.uk





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