

Annual Report

2020-2021



Cherwell
DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Foreword by Cllr Wood and Yvonne Rees

In challenging times such as these, it is more important than ever that you have confidence in your public services. This annual report is a window into how we have been putting your council tax – and other public funds – to work, for the good of the district.

As your council, it is our job to provide services such as waste collection, street cleansing, leisure centres and community services. It is also our role to safeguard and direct the future growth of our communities.

The pandemic has put a variety of pressures on councils all over the UK, including financial pressures, and, in that respect, we are no different. This February, councillors agreed a prudent budget that, for the first time in many years, included significant savings.

Despite the need to refocus and reprioritise in some areas, the big picture remains the same: we are committed to making Cherwell a cleaner and greener place to live and work, and a healthier and more prosperous one too.

We are really proud of the landmark achievements we have made during such a challenging 12 months. We have increased our performance in areas such as waste and recycling collection, with our frontline staff carrying the load of an annual increase, which exceeded the previous average annual increase by a factor of ten.

During the pandemic, we have taken on wholly new areas of activity, like distributing millions of pounds of grants to local businesses, supporting our local contact tracing service to reach people who the national system had not managed to contact, establishing a COVID secure team to advise businesses on compliance with new restrictions, informing the public about vital public health messages and increasing our support for the homeless.

Welcome to Cherwell District Council's annual report, providing an overview of our performance and our key achievements, from April 2020 to March 2021.

We have continued our work to support the economy and regenerate key areas of the district too. Building work at Castle Quay Waterfront has remained on track, with the new hotel and supermarket set to go live this summer.

The climate emergency is another issue that we have tackled head on. We successfully bid for £6 million to slash the carbon emissions of council buildings such as leisure centres, which will knock up to a quarter off our total carbon emissions by the end of 2021.

All the while our work to make it easier to live a healthy lifestyle continues to have a massive impact. With schemes like FAST adapting during the pandemic, recorded levels of inactivity continue to fall and ambitious plans to double sustainable transport are well underway too.

This report is full of lots more detail about the important work the council has been doing on behalf of residents over the past 12 months. Thank you for reading.



Councillor Barry Wood
Leader of Cherwell District Council



Yvonne Rees
Chief Executive
Cherwell District Council

Responding to the pandemic



We also:

helped **2,431 households** with council tax relief.



455 shielded residents

supported up to 31 March 2021, including supply of emergency food parcels, priority shopping slots, medication collection and referrals to NHS volunteer responders COVID vaccination enquiries.



built a new **local testing centre** at Woodgreen Leisure Centre in Banbury and hosted several temporary testing sites at Bodicote House.



donated over **55 bikes** for key workers.



COVID-19 has had a profound impact on residents and businesses across Cherwell. Many in our community have experienced personal loss, while the health, wellbeing and financial security of many more has been affected by the national restrictions put in place.

Throughout the year, we have been working hard to keep services operating despite the restrictions in place, including in areas essential to health and wellbeing such as environmental health, refuse and recycling, and housing. At the same time, council staff have been deployed in COVID-19 critical roles including the COVID secure team, which works to keep businesses operating with the best public health measures in place, and the community hub, where a dedicated team ensures that those self-isolating or advised to shield have access to the practical and welfare support they need. Business support arrangements have kept grant funds flowing and protected the economy where possible, while our Stop the Spread communications campaign has imparted public health guidance to residents and businesses alongside information about COVID cases in the district.

The council has established a community testing centre in Banbury, where anyone can access free rapid symptom-free testing. We have also been working alongside the NHS to contact those who have not responded to invitations to vaccines to offer advice and support, ensuring better outcomes for individuals and reducing the impact of the virus on us all.

Close to the community and with a wide range of local services, the council has been uniquely placed to support the pandemic response. In partnership with trusted organisations like Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire, the Banbury Mosque and town and parish councils, we have worked tirelessly to ensure that, even in the most difficult of circumstances, the most vulnerable have had access to advice, support and practical help.

The vaccination rollout across Oxfordshire began on 8 December at Oxfordshire's hospital hub – the Churchill Hospital in Oxford. By 31 March 2021, there were more than 10 local vaccination centres distributed across Cherwell. Cherwell District Council further supported the vaccination programme by working with the local NHS to run an outreach programme to maximise vaccination take-up.



Our strategic priorities

The 2020/21 business plan set out four strategic priorities supported by a number of programmes, projects and actions set out within the council's performance management framework.

Housing that meets your needs

We are committed to delivering affordable housing, raising the standard of rented housing and finding new and innovative ways to prevent homelessness. Also, we are committed to promoting innovative housing schemes, delivering the local plan and supporting the most vulnerable people in the district.



Leading on environmental sustainability



We are committed to delivering on sustainability and in the commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030, promoting the green economy and increasing recycling across the district. This priority includes the protection of our natural environment and our built heritage, and working in partnerships to improve air quality in the district and the reduction of environmental crime.



Healthy, resilient and engaged communities

We are committed to enabling all residents to lead an active life, improving and developing the quality of local sports and leisure facilities and promoting health and wellbeing in our communities. We also support community and cultural development, working with our partners to address the causes of health inequalities and deprivation and to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.



An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres



We are committed to supporting business retention and growth working with businesses to ensure compliance and achieve best practice. This includes developing skills and generating enterprise, and securing infrastructure to support growth across Cherwell through investment in our town centres, and the promotion of the district as a visitor destination.



Equalities:

Our equalities, diversity and inclusion framework, Including Everyone, was launched in October 2020.



This is our joint framework with Oxfordshire County Council, that outlines our joint approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion and sets out our vision to be leaders in our field providing inclusive services, workplaces and communities, equitable access to services and equality of opportunity.

A reverse mentoring scheme began in February 2020, which pairs staff from different teams and at different levels of experience so they can exchange skills, expertise and knowledge and learn from one another.

Under this framework we have delivered activities such as:

- Our Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion communications calendar has helped raise awareness around days and weeks that celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion, such as Lunar New Year, Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Mental Health Awareness Week and Stephen Lawrence Day.
- Three staff networks are now open to council employees to join (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Staff Network; Disability and Wellness Network; Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Intersex and Queer Staff Network).



Climate action framework:

CO₂

CO₂

The Climate Action Framework was approved in October 2020, and it describes how we will transform the way we work in order to “systematically drive lower-carbon outcomes”.

Cherwell District Council's own emissions account for less than half a per cent of the total emissions of the district. Recognising this, the council will not only drive its own carbon footprint down, it is also committing to use its local influence to help reduce emissions across the district as a whole.



Our priorities: Housing that meets your needs



We have worked with landlords throughout the pandemic to **help keep renters in their homes** offering temporary rent reductions, mediation and possible financial support, using the mediation scheme funded by the government. 1,159 new homes were built under this scheme.



We drafted a new strategic plan to **end homelessness and rough sleeping.**



We **processed and managed 1,545 planning applications** (just under 96 per cent within deadline), an 8 per cent increase from last year, none of which were overturned by the Planning Inspectorate.



We **helped 18 refugee families** settle in Cherwell as part of the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.



We **supported the vulnerable** with accommodation, access to schools, work and language lessons.



Our spatial services team received a **gold standard award** for consistently reaching and maintaining the highest standard on data excellence, awarded by GeoPlace. The annual measure awards are given to local authorities for the quality of their local land and property gazetteers.



Our housing team **helped 78 individuals** into temporary accommodation.



The UK's largest custom and self-build development, Graven Hill, has been named **the best residential development of the year** in the Oxfordshire property awards.

Build!®

A Cherwell District Council Initiative

Our innovative Build! project, which looks at alternative ways to deliver affordable homes for local people, received a **highly commended in the 'best supported housing landlord' category** at the 2020 UK Housing Awards.



We **delivered 295 affordable homes**, and 1,172 housing completions during 2020-21, exceeding the 1,140 required in the local plan.

£47k

We received a **£47,000 grant to support our new disabled adaptation policy**, which enables us to find new solutions to meet specific housing needs.



Our priorities: Leading on environmental sustainability



Our waste crews **emptied 5.4 million bins and collected 7,067 additional tonnes of waste** (an increase of just over 4,000 tonnes in the last 10 years). This resulted in 677 additional journeys and was equivalent to 103kg more waste, per household, than last year or another 10 bins for every household (over the last 12 months).



The business waste team, who serve 550 customers including 65 schools and charities, scooped a national award for **Collection Crew of the Year** at the Awards for Excellence in Recycling and Waste Management in November 2020.

Awards for EXCELLENCE
IN RECYCLING AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

WINNER



Ten buildings have been refitted with air source heat pumps and other **cleaner, greener improvements** using funding from The Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. This has helped us **slash our environmental impact by 25 per cent**.



Together with partners, we converted 12 parking bays at Bicester's Cattle Market into **electric vehicle charging hubs** as part of a £5.2 million park and charge programme.



We delivered the **Kidlington wayfinding project** and continue to fund **Wild Oxfordshire** to facilitate the Conservation Target Area project, all part of Cherwell's Community Nature Plan.



We continued to support the **investigation of environmental crimes** reported in the district, as well as advising businesses on how to dispose of their waste legally.



Our priorities: An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres



£41.3

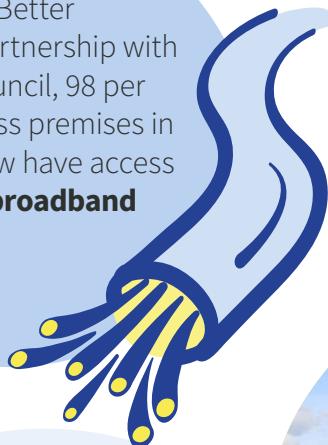
£41.3 million of business grants

were paid out to support businesses and charities across the district.

A £35,000 'Reopening High Streets Safely' **government grant has helped shops to reopen** following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, benefiting high streets in Banbury, Bicester, Kidlington and Deddington.

£

As part of our Better Broadband partnership with the county council, 98 per cent of business premises in the district now have access to **superfast broadband services**.



We teamed up with Banbury Business Improvement District and Chiltern Railways to offer Banbury shoppers a lower tariff at the railway station car park during Christmas 2020 to **help support the local economy**.



We supported the opening of a food and drink market, Lock29 in Castle Quay in August 2020, the **UK's first centre to celebrate food and drink provenance**.

LOCK 29



We successfully secured the **Premier Inn**, the **Light Cinema** and a range of attractions to increase footfall around the Canalside, a key part of the regeneration of Castle Quay in Banbury.

Our priorities: Healthy, resilient and engaged communities

Over 3,000 children attended our socially distanced, physical youth activator sessions, adapted and designed to help improve children's physical and mental wellbeing.



Resilient and engaged communities



To support people who were self-isolating, we processed 855 applications for support payments and **made 436 payments, totalling £218,000.**



Led by the healthy place shaping team and supported by local partners, this initiative worked with over 40 groups to **improve community health and wellbeing.**



Keeping the district active



Over **1,900 families** and **6,500 individuals signed up** to our families active sporting together (FAST) programme to help families in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington get active.



42 schools and **1,824 players** took part in this family-friendly game app that rewards primary school pupils, communities and schools for physical activity.

Street Tag



Two **new 5k circular health routes were launched** this year in Bicester. Funded by Public Health England, over 1,000 people walked the route. Similar routes are planned for Kidlington and Banbury.



The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), through Oxfordshire County Council, funded £71,326 to support local projects – Cherwell Larder, The Sunshine Centre, Banbury Mosque, Community First Oxfordshire – to help **tackle the economic impact of COVID-19** on our residents.



Our priorities: Healthy, resilient and engaged communities



Throughout the pandemic, we **provided advice and support** to residents who were clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) and shielding. We worked with partner organisations such as Community Connect, Age UK Oxfordshire, Samaritans, Oxfordshire Mind, Oxfordshire All In, and Citizens Advice for additional support.



An innovative collaboration between the council, Banbury Harriers Athletics Club, Banbury Star Cyclists' Club and Alchester Running Club saw **volunteers collecting shopping and prescriptions for those unable to leave their homes** due to shielding, as well as tending allotments.



The annual festival to **showcase local talent and celebrate the arts** was hosted virtually in September 2020, with content streamed live. The festival attracted over 2,700 viewers, from as far away as Idaho in the US.



We continued to **support businesses to re-open safely, raised awareness** about crime in partnership with the police and community wardens and **responded to reports** about unlicensed scrap metal dealers.

Resilient and engaged communities

How we spend your money



Below you can see in detail how these funds have been used.

Where did our funding come from?

£0.116m came from government grant

£7.517m from council tax

£11.484m from business rates

£5.837m from new homes bonus

This adds up to:

£24.954m - our funding for 2020-2021

Where did we spend our funding?

Here is where we spent our 2020-2021 funding and what services each directorate covers.

£5.908m - Environment and Place

Environmental Services, Growth and Economy and Planning and Development

£6.089m - Customers, Organisational Development and Resources

Customers, Cultural Services, IT, Communications, Strategy, Insight and Human Resources

£1.396m - Housing Services

Housing

£3.693m - Public Health and Wellbeing

Healthy Place Shaping and Wellbeing

- £1.270m - Commercial Development, Assets and Investment

Legal, Procurement and Contracts, Property and Investments, Growth and Commercial Programmes and Regulatory Services

£9.051m - Executive Matters

Includes Pensions, interest costs and bad debts

Performance in numbers: summary

Get in touch

If you have any feedback, please contact us by **emailing us at** customer.service@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

or call
customer
services:

01295 227001



Or, write to us:

Cherwell District Council
Customer Services
Bodicote House
Bodicote
Banbury
Oxfordshire

**From April 2020 to March 2021,
our customer services team
supported you**

91,200 phone calls

59,024 emails processed

177 face-to-face meetings
(COVID safe)

82.09% customer satisfaction

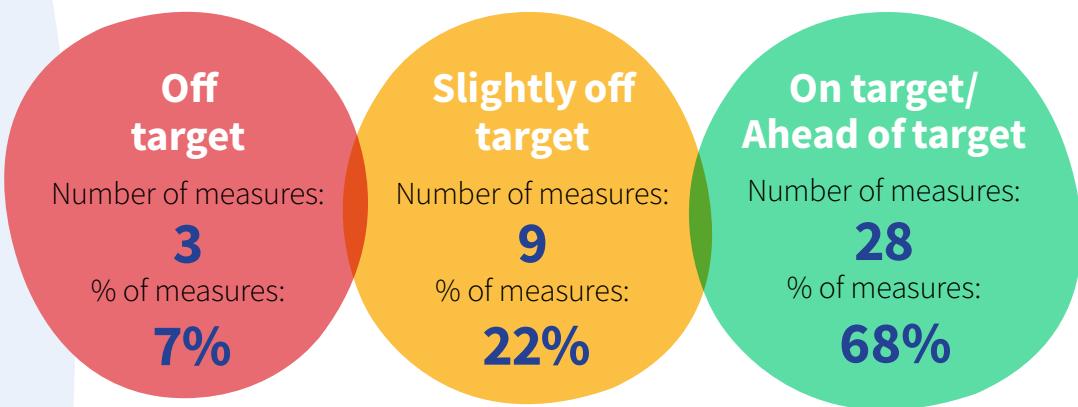
83.58% first contact resolution

We are here to help.

You can also find and email your ward councillor by visiting www.cherwell.gov.uk/findmycouncillor

Below summarises the progress we have made delivering against the activities, tasks and projects outlined in our business plan under each of the four strategic 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 by 10 per cent or more. For more information visit www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/189/performance/343/business-plan/3



Percentages are calculated based on a total of 41 measures.
One was not reported on due to COVID-19

In summary...

During an unprecedented year, we demonstrated strong overall performance across all four strategic priorities. Out of 41 measures, three didn't meet the target at the end of 2020/21, but considering the response achieved during a pandemic, the results were better than first predicted. One measure (high risk food businesses inspected) was not reported during the year following the Food Standard Agency's change in the national food law enforcement programme. There were nine measures slightly off target and the remaining 28 measures reached or surpassed the targets for 2020/21. It has been a tough year for everyone, but we have continued to make improvements to our services.

Listening and learning

Throughout the year, we provided and continue to provide opportunities to our residents to have their say. Whether it is through customer satisfaction surveys, consultations on budgets, new projects and services, talking to local business organisations or feedback through our website, we are keen to listen to what you like and what needs to be improved.

To participate in live consultations and sign up to notifications of future consultations visit www.cherwell.gov.uk/consultation or email consultation@cherwell-dc.gov.uk

