



Oxfordshire Councils Charter





Foreword by Cllr Leffman

– Leader, Oxfordshire County Council

Our county of Oxfordshire is a rich tapestry of diverse communities, from our thriving market towns and picturesque rural villages to our urban centres of learning, innovation and business – all represented by over 300 local councils.

Our vision is that this charter enhances partnership working across councils to empower a vibrant democracy across Oxfordshire. Working in partnership with our local councils is essential for responding to the needs of our residents, understanding our diverse communities, and providing effective services.

This charter recognises the importance of Oxfordshire’s town councils, parish councils and parish meetings in representing and delivering for the residents of Oxfordshire. We have developed the charter in consultation with town and parish councils from across the county together with the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) and our district and city council partners. We have listened carefully to the many councillors and clerks, who have helped identify the opportunities we can explore through the commitments in this charter and we are very grateful for their contributions.

I am excited about the ambitions of this charter and the changes that are already underway to improve how we work and communicate with our local councils. I invite all Oxfordshire councils to become signatories to the charter to demonstrate our mutual ambition to working better together through shared principles and commitments. I hope you will want to join us in this endeavour.

May 2024



Foreword by Lucy Dalby, County Officer, Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC)

As representatives of Oxfordshire's town and parish councils we are delighted to welcome this charter, which is a positive step to achieving better partnership working between Oxfordshire councils.

Since OALC instigated the idea of a charter, we have ensured local councils have been consulted directly and we have advocated for councils' needs and concerns throughout its development. We are proud to have created this charter in collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council and our city and district council partners.

It has been extremely positive to see so many councils engaging enthusiastically with this process and we want to thank every councillor, clerk and officer who has contributed.

This work does not end with the launching of the charter – we will remain involved as this work moves forward, and the real and impactful changes needed for partnership working to reach its full potential. Councils will also continue to have the opportunity to feed in to how the charter is implemented. We hope individual councils will want to become signatories too in demonstrating their commitment to better partnership working and enhancing local democracy for their communities.



Introduction

This charter has been developed by a cross-council working group in collaboration with Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC), to set out a framework for better partnership working in Oxfordshire. The contents of the charter have been shaped by feedback from town and parish councils across the county through a number of consultation and engagement activities.

The intention for the charter is that it is a voluntary framework that will help shape how Oxfordshire councils can work together in partnership to support better service delivery and outcomes, and to work together to ensure thriving local democracy across the county. This charter is not designed to replace or override existing frameworks, such as codes of conduct or councils' individual ways of working, but to enhance them, with a particular focus on cross-council working and recognising the role of local councils in supporting a thriving local democracy.

Strategic aims for the charter

These aims represent our shared long-term goals as signatories to the charter. The charter's performance will be measured against these aims over time.

1. Stronger partnership working between Oxfordshire councils.

Taking a cooperative, collaborative and collective approach when working together for the wellbeing of our diverse communities, improving service delivery and supporting the needs of our residents.

Success looks like:

- Councils share best practice with each other, consistently working to improve how services are delivered and experienced by residents.
- Councils can identify opportunities where there is value in working collaboratively in partnership to deliver better outcomes for residents and communities.
- Councils are breaking down barriers to better partnership working.

2. Enhancing local democracy.

Working to empower resident and community participation in local democracy at all levels, recognizing that local democracy goes wider than the election cycle.

Success looks like:

- Councils use the tools and resources at their disposal to advocate for their communities and residents.
- Councils can identify barriers to resident and community participation in local democratic processes and take steps to break down those barriers.
- Councils can identify and build on opportunities to engage with their communities, particularly with underrepresented groups.



Our shared principles

Our shared principles are the ‘golden thread’ of values that underpin how we aim to meet the charter’s commitments and achieve the charter’s strategic aims. These principles guide how we implement and integrate the charter, how we work together and how we treat each other as partners.

Mutual respect

- We recognise and acknowledge what unites us – representing and delivering for our communities and residents.
- We treat each other with respect, civility, and dignity, abiding by our respective codes of conduct.
- We understand that different types of council operate differently – we respect our differences and act on good faith.

Relationship building

- We foster constructive and collaborative relationships and connections between councils, councillors, clerks, officers, partners, and communities.
- We remove barriers to building effective relationships.

Transparency and accountability

- We share information and communicate transparently.
- We are transparent with processes and how councils make decisions.
- We signpost appropriately.



Our shared commitments

These are our shared commitments that will help to achieve our strategic aims: stronger partnership working and enhance local democracy. The commitments are purposely kept at a high-level to enable each council to apply them to their own priorities and ways of working, providing a framework for councils to shape how they work together.

Communication

Councils will:

- Enhance how we listen and respond to one another. Availability and accessibility will be central to how we interact.
- Communicate with respect and civility, maintaining an open dialogue.
- Communicate openly and transparently, explaining processes and decision-making.

Consultation and engagement

Councils will:

- Engage with one another at the earliest opportunity, recognizing the diverse perspectives and challenges faced by various stakeholders and communities.
- Ensure that consultation and engagement processes are as accessible as possible.
- Actively follow-up on consultations and feedback in an appropriate manner.

Resources

Councils will:

- Share relevant and appropriate information to empower each other to best support our residents and communities.
- Optimise access and signposting to resources and practical support.
- Identify opportunities where resources and support can be effectively shared between councils to improve outcomes for residents.

Local democracy

Councils will:

- Empower our residents and communities to participate in local democracy, including young people and underrepresented groups.
- Put residents and communities at the heart of what we do.
- Respect the democratic mandate of all councillors.

Implementation

All Oxfordshire councils will be invited to be a signatory of the charter. The intention is that this charter remains a 'living' document, with the charter being the beginning and not the end of this work to improve partnership working.

Once the charter has been agreed by councils, each council will be responsible for their own implementation of the charter's principles and commitments. The working group will support councils to capture the progress and successes of the charter to enable sharing best practice and positive communications (e.g 'you said, we did' pieces).