

# Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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Wards affected: All

South Cabinet member responsible: Cllr David Rouane

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South Cabinet on 27 June 2024

## Oxfordshire Councils Charter

### Recommendations

That Cabinet endorses the Oxfordshire Councils Charter and agrees to be a signatory.

Implications (further detail within the report)	Financial	Legal	Climate and Ecological	Equality and diversity
	No	No	No	No
Signing off officer	Simon Hewings	Vivien Williams	Chloe Bunting	Abi Witting

### Purpose of report

1. To update Cabinet members on the development of the Oxfordshire Councils Charter attached at **appendix 1**.
2. To endorse the charter and become a signatory party along with other councils in Oxfordshire.

### Corporate objectives

3. The proposals would meet this Vale of White Horse District Council objective:

- Working in partnership - residents, businesses, and organisations.
4. The proposals would meet this South Oxfordshire District Council objective:
    - Openness and accountability – best outcomes for residents”.

## **Background**

5. Oxfordshire County Council has been working in partnership with the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC), district and city councils, town and parish councils, and parish meetings to strengthen partnership working across local councils in Oxfordshire.
6. Through a multi-organisational working group, development of the Oxfordshire Councils Charter sets out principles and commitments to achieve two aims: stronger partnership working and enhancing local democracy.
7. The Oxfordshire Councils Charter aims to be a mutually agreed set of principles and commitments for all Oxfordshire councils, that underpin how they could all work together and deliver outcomes for residents.
8. The charter itself is intended to be high-level, with mutually agreed principles and commitments. This was agreed as a working group in order to enable all signatory parties to adopt the charter within their own capacity, resource, and ways of working. The charter is voluntary, with each signatory council to decide how it will implement or apply the contents of the charter.
9. 135 (nearly half) of Oxfordshire’s local councils have engaged with the charter’s consultation activities during its development.
10. On 26 October 2023, a roundtable event was held at County Hall, attended by 100 people representing 88 local councils.
11. A six-week survey was launched following the roundtable to enable all local councils the opportunity to input into this work. There were 164 responses to the survey, representing 85 local councils.
12. Across both the roundtable event and the initial survey, a total of 119 local councils engaged in the early development stage.
13. Five key themes for improvement were identified through this research: relationships, communication, communities, consultation and engagement, and resources.
14. A draft charter was developed based on the findings and themes from the first engagement exercise. All town and parish councils were invited to feedback on the draft charter via a consultation on Let’s Talk Oxfordshire over a six-week period January to February 2024. District, city and county councillors were also invited to respond to the consultation.
15. 96 consultation responses were submitted, with an overall supportive response of the aims, principles, and commitments of the draft charter:
  - 78% responded that they think the aims meet the needs of Oxfordshire councils.
  - 87% responded that they think the principles are the right principles for the charter.
  - 91% responded that they think the commitments are the right commitments to include in the charter.

16. The charter working group analysed the feedback on specific sections of the draft charter and identified areas for consideration and redrafting. The contents of the charter remain broadly the same, but elements have been reworded to provide clarity, avoid duplication and to ensure that the charter wording captures and communicates the intention of the charter.
17. The charter will have been considered by Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet in May 2024 and subsequently taken through the individual democratic processes in all five district and city councils within Oxfordshire in June. OALC intend to launch the charter at its Annual General Meeting on 1 July 2024.
18. It is anticipated that this charter will complement the district council's already established and evolving partnership, communications and engagement activities with town and parish councils including monthly newsletters, periodic online forums and workshops, and Planning surgeries.

### **Options**

19. Cabinet may choose not to endorse the charter and not become a signatory council.

### **Financial Implications**

20. There are no anticipated financial implications with this report.

### **Legal Implications**

21. There are no anticipated legal implications with this report.

### **Climate and ecological impact implications**

22. There are no anticipated climate and ecological implications with this report.

### **Equalities implications**

23. Equalities have been considered at every stage of this process including in making the survey and consultation as accessible as possible. The charter aims to improve local democracy which includes making it more accessible to underrepresented groups and increasing diversity in participating in local democracy, such as for young people, parents, and ethnically diverse people.

### **Risks**

24. During the development of the charter, there was an identified risk that its purpose or content could seek to undermine or place undue requirements on the proposed signatory councils.
25. The charter is intended as a voluntary, high level set of principles and commitments, that places no direct obligations on individual councils regarding its implementation and application. Future reviews of the charter, when undertaken, should seek to continue on that basis as a primary mitigation.

## **Conclusion**

26. The Oxfordshire Councils Charter aims to be a mutually agreed set of aims, principles and commitments for all Oxfordshire councils, that underpin how councils can work together and deliver outcomes for residents.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Oxfordshire Councils Charter