



MINUTES OF MEETING OF WHITCHURCH-ON-THAMES PARISH COUNCIL
At the Village Hall at 20:00 Thursday, September 11, 2025

DRAFT

Councillors Present: Jim Donahue (Chairman), Diana Smith, Katherine Higley (arrived 9:05pm), Debbie Leach, Frances Parkes, Paul O'Grady and Romilly Swann.

Officers Present: Brian Inglis (Clerk and RFO)

Public and Press: 3 members of the public and Alex Carter (Henley Standard)

District or County Councillor: Cllr Peter Dragonetti (SODC)

Councillors observed a minute of silence in memory of former parish clerk, Jane Yamamoto who recently died.

1 **Apologies for absence & Parish Council Declaration –**

There were no apologies for absence. The Chairman read the Parish Council Declaration

2 **Declarations of Interest –** Cllr Leach declared an interest in item 9.5 and would not vote.

3 **Public Forum –** One member of the public gave councillors some insight in to item 9.5

4 **To approve minutes of the meeting of July 10, 2025.**

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the minutes, and these were signed by the Chairman.

5 **Chairman's Announcements - See Appendix 1**

6 **To receive reports from District and County Councillors**

6.1 SODC District Councillor Report – Cllr Dragonetti expanded on a previously submitted report. **See Appendix 2**

6.2 OCC County Councillor Report – Cllr Filipova-Rivers previously submitted a report. **See Appendix 3**

7 **Planning Applications –** to agree Council's response to the following notification(s).

7.1 **P25/S2132/HH** Demolition and replacement of existing summerhouse (6x3 metres) with a new single storey shed and garden office (8x4 metres total) on same site for incidental/occasional use only.

Cedar Cottage, High Street, Whitchurch-on-Thames RG8 7ER

Council voted to make no comment on this application

7.2 **P25/S2272/DIS**, relating to Application **P24/S2700/S73**

Cedar Lodge Care Home Eastfield Lane Whitchurch-On-Thames

Council were not consultees, but submitted comments which had been acknowledged by the case officer.

8 The Clerk gave a brief report on decisions made by SODC since the last meeting and updated Councillors on the status of applications which are still under consideration, including works to trees in the village.

9 **Finance:**

9.1 To approve the payment schedule for August and September:

Payments:	Sub-total	VAT	Total
Staff Expenditure (August)		-	704.20
Pd – Greenhatch Group – Survey Works (Playground)	1150.00	230.00	1380.00
Pd – Scofell Landscapes Inv 36800 – Grass Cutting	694.44	138.89	833.33
Pd – Lloyds Bank – July Charges	-	-	4.25
Pd – Printinco – Summer Bulletin Printing	-	-	542.00
Pd – R Williams – Reimbursement (Postage)	-	-	12.84
Pd – RoSPA Play Safety – Annual Playground Inspection	92.00	18.40	110.40
Pd – Stocksigns Ltd – Traffic Safety Sign	3025.00	605.00	3630.00
Lloyds Bank – August Charges	-	-	4.25
Scofell Landscapes Inv 37046 – Grass Cutting	694.44	138.89	833.33
Moore – External Audit Fees	236.25	47.25	283.50
OALC – Clerk Training Course (Finance)	110.00	22.00	132.00

Resolution: The Council voted to approve the payments.

9.2 To note receipts as detailed:

Receipts:	Amount
PJ Wise – Whitchurch Bulletin Advert	75.00

9.3 **Bank Statements and Reconciliations for August 2025:**

The RFO gave a concise report on documents which had been previously circulated and scrutinised by councillors, answering questions to the satisfaction of councillors.

9.4 An updated Financial and Management Risk Assessment for 2025/26 (previously circulated) was approved.

9.5 A request from the Whitchurch “Save Our Spire” appeal for grant funding of £3.000 was considered. After some discussion and further input from the applicant, this was approved. An amount of £2929.48 would be drawn from currently held CIL funds, with the balance of £70.52 being paid from parish council budget.

10 The contents of the External Audit Report were noted. Receipt of the External Audit Certificate was noted and this has been published, along with the Notice of Conclusion of Audit.

10.1 Councillors noted the requirement contained in Assertion 10, that the Parish Council should operate a PC owned email address system. (Action – Clerk to provide further detail, showing options and associated costs)

11 The Clerk gave a report to Councillors on the progress of the Hardwick Road Verges Project, as follows - The Highways permit is yet to be issued, but our contractor is hopeful of this being imminent.

12 Cllr Higley reported that the consultation period on the draft Conservation Area Appraisal is now open online at SODC and a news item has been published on the village website giving details of how residents can take part, including how a hard copy of the document can be viewed.

13 Councillors noted the contents of the annual RoSPA inspection report, with no new actions.

Motion: The Chairman moved that under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public shall be excluded from the remainder of the meeting by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

Resolution: Councillors voted in favour. All members of public and press left the meeting.

14 Councillors discussed the results of a recent survey which had been carried out on an area of Parish Council land and following some discussion, it was agreed that a copy would be sent to any resident who may be affected by the survey results. (Action – Clerk to finalise wording of any accompanying message to be sent)

15 To review progress on any open actions from previous Parish Council meetings and agree any revision of actions on the action list. The list was updated, with some actions being marked as complete.

- 16 To consider the wording for any Thank You notes to be sent on behalf of the Parish Council.
(Action – Cllr Higley to draft a note of thanks to the Appraisal Team at SODC, acknowledging their contribution to the ongoing consultation)
- 17 Items for Report and Inclusion on the next scheduled Agenda – deadline Thursday, October 2, 2025.
- 18 To confirm the date and time of next meeting as Thursday October 9, 2025 at 20:00

APPENDIX 1 – CHAIRMAN’S ANNOUNCEMENTS – Cllr Jim Donahue

Cedar Lodge opening

I attended the opening celebration for Cedar Lodge a few weeks ago on 22 August. It was very well attended by members of the community, and the facilities all look in very new and professional condition as would imagine. There are at least two long-time residents who work at the front reception. They had 10 residents at the time and stated that their policy was to only gradually increase the number of residents after smaller numbers were settled.

I have been raising the condition of Eastfield Lane to OCC Highways as it is clearly worse than the condition was prior to work over the last two years:

- OCC’s official response is ‘This road has been proposed for surfacing inlay or minor patching in the next financial year.

As the state of the road is rough and unsafe, especially given daily the school run, and now care home staff and residents, as well as flooding risks on the road, I am pushing for attention sooner than next year:

- I reported 17 small potholes as a FMS super user the week of 22 August.
- I have asked Highways to address some of the larger potholes and deteriorated road by the verge. They said the person responsible was away and encouraged me to report them as FMS Super User
- I have reported 11 farther Fixmystreet reports – mostly for much larger areas, especially along the south verge of the road. I have asked OCC Highways to help with getting these actioned.

Eastfield Lane Culvert Topological Survey

I received the following update from Geoff Weir of the Flood Forum: “The topographical survey was successfully completed on 11th and 12th August with the kind co-operation of the riparian landowners. Having seen the survey results Leigh Travers, SODC’s Flood Risk and Drainage Engineer, asked the flood forum for some further information on the culvert and this has just been provided by the landowner and passed to Leigh. We are now awaiting Leigh’s further analysis and recommendations which the flood forum will discuss with a view to agreeing the next steps with Leigh. “

Resident issues:

- **High Street drain blockage near tollbooth** - has finally been cleared – the night of our last meeting on 10th July. This seems to be a result of FMS super users have now been given the ability to action blocked drains. The broken grid from that work has been replaced. I have asked the OCC drainage manager to investigate if these pipes between the gullies in these section of the road are working.
- **High Street Drain blockage upper narrows** - I received a concern from a resident in the upper narrows near the art gallery that was concerned about basement flooding and blockage causing the manhole cover on the pavement. I understand that the work happening this week is a result of that. As of today, they have found a blockage in the drain under the pavement towards The Little House that is likely a collapsed pipe. They say it may be quite complicated to repair due to utilities so the 3-way system may be in place for 3 weeks or more.
- A resident asked me to report that drains on Manor Road near the High Street are cleared, however when I met the resident after the recent rains the drains were now clear.

APPENDIX 2 – REPORT from DISTRICT COUNCILLOR – Cllr Peter Dragonetti

Electoral Roll

Every year the District Council has to update the electoral roll, and it always used to be the case of sending out letters and asking for responses, but the council now has email addresses for 62% of households across the district, and so emails are going out and recipients will be asked to confirm no changes or make changes online as necessary. This is obviously a significant cost saving in printing and postage costs, but households who do not reply to the email, or who are not contactable by email, will still receive letters.

Summer is Nearly Over

We have had a very good summer for outdoor living, and many people will have visited the outdoor heated pool at Crowmarsh. My family certainly enjoyed it and the riverside setting. The pool opening season was extended for an extra week to Sunday 7th, but it is now closed for the winter.

Councillor Grant

This grant has been increased to £7500, and is available to be shared on community projects in my ward. The grant team at the council can guide on what is eligible, and my discretion only comes in when there are competing valid projects asking for funding. The deadline for applications is midday on 5 December; please look at the SODC website for information and guidance and application forms.

Local Government Review

Things seem to have gone a bit quiet on this front, although no doubt the political /bureaucratic machine is no doubt grinding forward relentlessly in the background. I wonder if the government, with all the other worries it has, might now be regretting setting this process in motion. The principal of if it aint broke, don't fix it, could well apply particularly in respect of our local area.

Planning

We sometimes see on the news situation where travellers move on to land and start importing surfacing material to create a caravan site without planning permission. A couple of weeks ago that was reported as happening at Tetsworth, and, with legal advice, SODC issued a Stop Notice, the breaching of which is a criminal offence.

APPENDIX 3 – REPORT from COUNTY COUNCILLOR – Cllr Maggie Filipova-Rivers

1. Apply For The Priority Fund Soon

Applications for the Priority Fund opened in early August and the deadline for submitting applications will be 5pm on 30 November 2026. If you have any ideas of potential project please get in touch so we can discuss. [Read more](#) about eligibility and how to apply.

2. Whitchurch Survey Underway To Prevent Future Flooding

A new survey is underway in Whitchurch-on-Thames to investigate causes of and solutions to localised flooding issues.

A grant has been awarded to Whitchurch Parish Council to conduct this topographical survey. Depending on the survey's outcome, further action may be proposed. Read more [here](#).

3. Changes To Bus Routes/Timetables

134 Goring to Wallingford

- The contract has been awarded to Thames Travel until 25 March 2028. The number of buses stays the same, but the times have been regularised and make better connections with trains.
- I understand Thames Travel are hoping to brand the bus for the route and are looking to work with Great Western Railway on some specific rail link elements to this.
- The bus will stay on the current route between Goring station and Wallingford town centre with the exception of the Lockstile Mead section in Goring, where the bus will stay on the main road. OCC are currently looking at additional bus stop provision for this area. This will be a trial arrangement initially, to see whether there are issues with bus movement on the narrow roads in Cleeve and South Stoke.

- The bus will no longer extend to/from Lidl and will serve the hospital stops on Reading Road on all journeys. Buses to Goring will depart from stop C in Wallingford Market Place, outside Greggs – and not from the cobbles outside the town hall as now. The new timetable has been published and can be found [here](#)
133 Goring to Wallingford (via Maulsford)
- A revised timetable can be found [here](#) for Going Forward Buses service 133 from Monday 1 September.
- The timetable includes new journeys on Thursdays, giving a Monday to Friday service.
Woodcote X40
- The service will be increased to operate up to every 20 minutes on weekdays and every 30 minutes on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Buses will return to operate via the Abingdon Road in Oxford, offering faster journeys into the City Centre for passengers, stopping only at Redbridge Park&Ride, Canning Crescent, St Aldates Police Station and Westgate.
- Night bus NX40 will continue to operate via the Iffley Road but will now extend beyond Wallingford to Reading, with support from Reading Borough Council. The last buses will be 03:30 from Oxford and 03:05 from Reading, both operating as far as Wallingford.
- Brand new high-specification buses will be introduced on the route, offering greater capacity and smoother journeys for passengers.

4. Electric blanket testing

Don't forget to book a slot to get your electric blankets tested at sessions to be held across the county this September and October. [Book your slot](#)

5. A Level results, where to go for advice on next steps

Students who are unsure of their next steps are being encouraged by Oxfordshire County Council to explore the wealth of advice and information on options available from key and trusted organisations. Help is on offer about continuing in education to seeking employment or training. Advice can be found at [oxme.info](#) and on the [National Careers Service](#)'s website or through its helpline 0800 100 900.

Young people interested in apprenticeships can visit a number of websites for further information: [oxme](#), [Gov.UK](#) or [UCAS](#). While those who haven't got the grades necessary for higher education or their university of choice, there are options. Students can access key advice from [UCAS](#) or can read the education hub blog on [Gov.UK](#).

6. Oxfordshire County Council Announces Circular Economy Plan

Oxfordshire County Council is taking steps to embed circular economy principles into its procurement processes. The plan will focus on three principles:

1. Designing out waste and pollution
2. Keeping materials and products in use for longer
3. Regenerating natural systems

The council hopes this transition will drive more sustainable economic practices across the region and help achieve its goal of reaching a 70% recycling rate by 2030. For more information please see [here](#).

7. Leader of OCC Liz Leffnan Meeting with the Minister for School Standards

Lisa Lyons, Stephen Chandler and Liz met Minister Catherine McKinnell which was arranged following her letter to the minister in December on SEND. The county council's message to her was that SEND needs to be both properly funded and reformed and that something needs to be agreed about the statutory override. Following the meeting members of her team have been in touch to ask for further details from our officers.

8. House of Lords Event on Rail

The County Council together with Baroness Jan Royal hosted an event in the House of Lords on June 16th to make the case for investment in rail in Oxfordshire. Cabinet members for Infrastructure and Highways were also there. Sarah Hayward of Advanced Oxford, <https://www.advancedoxford.com/> led the event, which was well attended by businesses and members of both houses, as well as the Chair of the Oxford Growth Commission, Neale Coleman. The Leader of OCC also attended the first meeting of the Oxford Growth Commission. Meetings will be taking place every couple of months.

9. Adult Social Care: Feedback from Providers

As part of OCC's work in Adult Social Care the cabinet member meets regularly with Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers and representatives from domiciliary and care home providers. Recent discussions with OACP and care providers highlighted three main areas of concern:

- **Transport & Workforce Travel:** Impact of the congestion charge on care staff; clarity needed on exemptions and Park & Ride capacity; parking near service users' homes essential; cycling considered impractical.
- **Commissioning & Assessments:** Concerns over "light touch" care home framework; assessments being pushed down, leading to hospital readmissions; Trusted Assessor model valued but should be strengthened; questions on system costs and NHS role.
- **Provider Capacity & Quality:** Drop in OCC-referred work affecting staff retention; queries about removal of zonal system; long gaps in CQC inspections despite high fees; frustration that commissioning focuses on cost rather than quality.

Need care or support? Oxfordshire's Adult Social Care Information and Advice Hub provides access to information and online forms like the self-assessment and financial assessment - all in one place. [Find adult social care support](#)

10. Latest resurfacing programme set to improve 111,000 square metres of roads

Oxfordshire County Council and its principal highways contractor M Group will visit 36 sites to carry out essential resurfacing. Work started at the end of June and is scheduled to run until 17 October.

The programme includes three main types of resurfacing:

- Safety schemes targeting accident prone areas to improve skid resistance.
- Surface inlay work where the road surface has deteriorated but the foundations remain sound. This involves removing and replacing defective layers.
- Structural maintenance, which is more intensive reconstruction for severely damaged roads.

Updated details about the programme, including a map showing where and when the work will be taking place, is available on the council's [website](#). However, the programme will be subject to alterations depending on the weather.

The latest resurfacing work follows the council's [surface dressing](#) road maintenance programme, most of which was completed between April and June.

11. Local Grant For Energy-Efficiency Housing Improvements

Welcome the Warmth offers qualifying homes of Oxfordshire County fully-funded energy-efficiency improvements to homes such as low carbon heating. Check your eligibility and apply online at [Welcome the Warmth](#).

12. New Electric Vehicle Scheme for Residents Without Driveways

A new kerbside charging scheme is now live, offering 500 Oxfordshire residents without off-street parking the opportunity to charge an electric vehicle (EV) directly outside their own home. For more information please see [here](#).

To apply, please click [here](#).

13. Gigahubs and Increased Rural Connectivity

The council has completed its Gigahubs project at 192 public service and local authority sites to increase broadband coverage in rural areas, improving digital access and connectivity for underserved communities.

In addition to enhancing community services, health and social care support, and reducing the need for people to travel further afield to access vital public services, the project will also incentivise more investment from the commercial sector in rural areas. Read more [here](#).

14. Finance, Property and Transformation – The “Fair Funding” Paper

The government has issued its “Fair Funding” paper relating to Local Government Finance. It is out to consultation, and OCC Cabinet will be asked to authorise OCC’S section 114 officer to make Oxfordshire’s response.

Rather typically, the government has announced publicly the positive bits – “we are giving more money to local government” and not the harder bits, which are that the money will be distributed away from rural areas. There will be a rebalancing of business rates, so that areas that have expanded massively and have been allowed to keep the additional rates, won’t keep the upside in the future.

In the meantime, OCC is run increasingly efficiently, there are healthy reserves and the Treasury function produces excellent returns, so OCC is in a better position than most of its peers. The government has also pushed sorting out the accumulated negative reserves associated with SEND into the long grass, extending the statutory override by 2 years. At which point the issue will be bigger. It has also delayed addressing adult social care.

15. Local Government Finance and Council Tax Reform

The Commons’ Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee has called for local authorities to be given greater fiscal powers. This includes allowing councils to:

- Revalue properties
- Define property bands
- Set council tax rates
- Apply discounts

The committee’s report stated that devolving financial responsibility is essential to fixing the local government finance system. Cllr Pete Marland, Chair of the LGA’s Economy and Resources Board, emphasised the need for a sustainable model that enables councils to meet rising demand and cost pressures.

16. Future Economy and Innovation

There have been several developments on the national policy front which impact how OCC will go about economic policy development in the coming months:

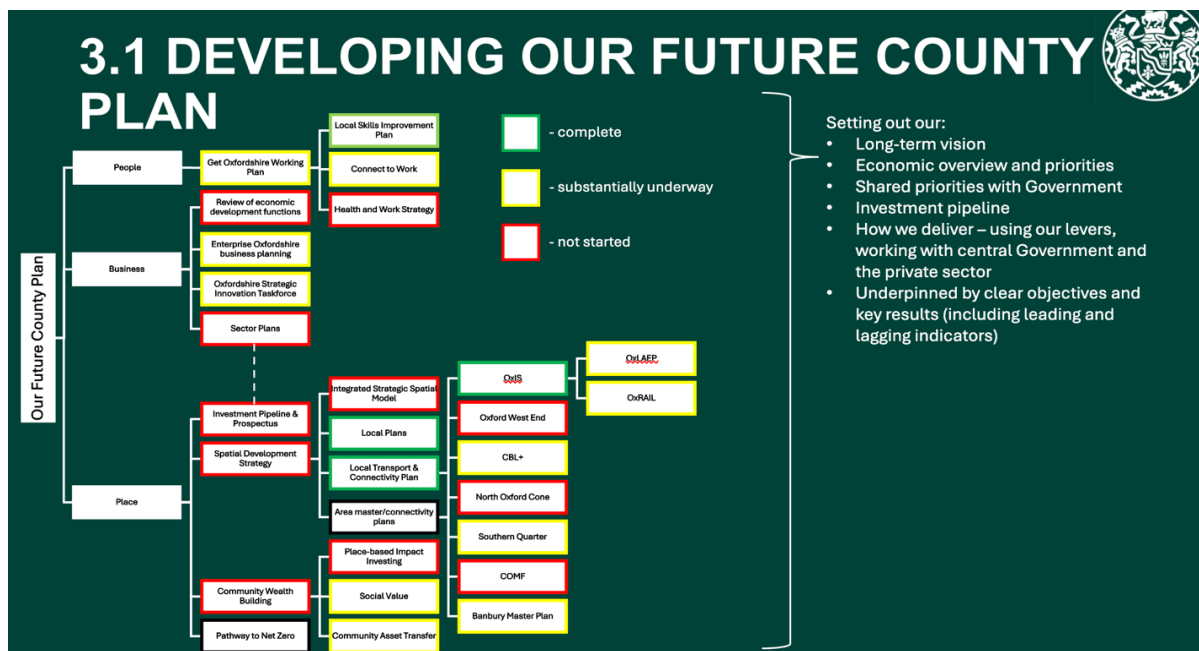
English Devolution White Paper	Get Britain Working White Paper	The UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy	Planning & Infrastructure Bill	National Planning Policy Framework	10-Year Infrastructure Strategy
Mandates significant local government reform and devolves substantial powers over transport, skills, housing, and economic development to Strategic Authorities – creating a statutory duty for Mayors to establish Local Growth Plans . Local Growth Plans provide a “guiding star” for the development of other functional strategies.	Mandates places to develop a “place-based” strategy for employment, skills, and reducing economic inactivity. This means integrating local health, education, and social care services to help more residents into good jobs. In Oxfordshire, this will be known as the Get Oxfordshire Working Plan .	Provides a national framework recognising sector strengths , and sets out government interventions to help those sectors to grow across the country. Eight priority sectors: advanced manufacturing, clean energy, creative industries, defence, digital & tech, financial services, life sciences, professional & business	The Planning and Infrastructure Bill introduces Spatial Development Strategies to guide strategic planning at a sub-regional level across England. These strategies will identify key infrastructure needs and strategic development locations. The SDSs will influence local plans and ensure a coordinated approach to development and infrastructure.	The core national planning guidance. OCC, as a planning authority, must adhere to its principles for local plans, housing delivery, Green Belt protection, and climate change mitigation in all planning decisions.	Outlines £725bn long-term government investment in national and regional infrastructure. Commits to East West Rail and the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme .

One of the key elements is guidance for “Local Growth Plans”, which will be the economic plans for Strategic Authorities. Although there are elements of this OCC will not be able to directly implement before devolution, using this guidance

as a base will allow the council to produce something that positions Oxfordshire well for the devolution journey on a “no regrets” basis. It integrates with other key economic planning at the Strategic Authority level:



Below is a slide extracted from an officer briefing that gives a sense of how the broader economic development activity fits together:



OCC’s Cabinet see the review of its economic development functions as a key piece of activity, which is currently being kicked off. This will allow the council to articulate a clear picture of why it operates in the way it does, as well as providing the foundation to potentially make some significant changes.

17. Positive Developments in Oxfordshire’s Innovation and Economic Growth

Oxfordshire continues to strengthen its reputation as a national and international leader in innovation, with progress seen across academia, business, and public services. Key updates include:

- **Innovation Ecosystem Growth:** Oxfordshire’s network of world-class universities, science parks (Harwell, Milton Park, Culham), and market towns is driving a vibrant mix of R&D, tech development, and entrepreneurial activity.
- **Council-led Connectivity and Inclusion** The County Council is investing in physical and digital infrastructure to connect innovation hubs and ensure communities across the county benefit from emerging opportunities in areas such as:

- Green technology
- Artificial intelligence
- Quantum computing
- Advanced manufacturing
- **Innovate Oxfordshire Project** The council's flagship in-house innovation programme continues to support local government transformation and industry collaboration, with recent projects including:
 - 5G testing and rollout
 - Autonomous vehicle trials
 - Robotics in health and social care
 - Development of zero-emission mobility solutions
- **Inclusive Economic Participation** Apprenticeships and supported internships are being used to widen access to career opportunities, from entry-level roles to PhD-level work in emerging technology sectors.
- **National Innovation Leadership** Oxfordshire leads the country in pending patent applications and the financial value of university spinouts, even surpassing Cambridge.
- **Regional Collaboration and Ambition** To unify innovation assets and boost regional leadership, the Council is exploring the formation of a mayoral combined authority across the Thames Valley, aiming to position Oxfordshire at the heart of a European Silicon Valley.

18. Young Peoples Supported Accommodation (YPSA) Contract

Oxfordshire County Council has approved an 18-month extension of its Young People's Supported Accommodation (YPSA) contracts to April 2027. YPSA is designed as a 'moving on' scheme, with young people typically staying an average of 2.3 years—six months of trust-building followed by around 18 months of developing independence skills.

The revised proposal reduces provision from 203 units to 154 is reflecting the closure of low-occupancy and unsustainable settings agreed mutually with providers. The scheme will also now align with statutory obligations by serving young people up to 21 years old (rather than 25). Importantly, those currently in YPSA will not be required to leave early due to the policy change, though some may move between facilities as certain contracts end.

The council has strengthened its commitment that no young person will be made homeless as a result of these changes, with mitigation measures in place as the new arrangements take effect from 1 October 2025.

The reduction in units is worrying to me personally, and the District Council has also voiced concerns.

19. Oxford Temporary Congestion Charge Update

Following the recent consultation on the proposed temporary congestion charge in Oxford, this update sets out the next steps.

The council received 7,165 survey responses, which have informed several amendments to the scheme. These will be considered by the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 August, with a final cabinet decision on 10 September. Key revisions include:

- Free park and ride journeys for the first two months (covering the Christmas period)
- Additional permits for specific cases (e.g. ice hockey clubs, business cars)

The scheme is designed to ease congestion while Botley Road remains closed, improve bus services, and maintain access for carers, traders, and blue badge holders. While concerns were raised about business impacts and fairness, there was also strong support for the potential benefits to congestion, air quality, and public transport.

Scrutiny papers and supporting documents, including responses to key consultation issues are published [here](#). Subject to cabinet approval in September, the scheme could begin this autumn.