



**Oxfordshire  
Inclusive Economy  
Partnership**

Strategy 2023-2026

**Foreward**

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## Introduction

In March 2021, a range of partners drawn from Oxfordshire’s public, private, voluntary and community sectors came together to collaborate on launching the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership. The partnership was formed following a series of [workshops and seminars in 2019/20](#) looking at the state of the inclusive economy in Oxfordshire.

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) is a county-wide group that brings together employers, business, education, community groups and local government – our aim is to work together to create opportunities and benefits for all people within the county. We will do this by sharing knowledge, expertise and resources, and create links between different areas of work. We are focused on four areas to deliver our vision: education, employment, social value and procurement, and place shaping. We aim to work with projects across Oxfordshire that the OIEP can support, grow or amplify their work. We are also building a repository of resources, case studies and signposting to support organisations working towards a more inclusive economy.

Oxfordshire is home to significant inequalities. It is only one of three regions that contributes a surplus to the UK economy, but despite its global position and perceived affluence, its wealth and opportunities are not evenly distributed.

According to the 2019 English Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Oxfordshire contains 17 (out of 407) LSOAs (Lower-layer Super Output Areas) within the 2 most deprived IMD deciles – deciles 1 and 2. They are mostly contained within 10 wards – 1 in Abingdon, 3 in Banbury and 6 in Oxford<sup>1</sup>. The IMD focuses on seven domains of deprivation: income, employment, education, skills and training, health and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services and living environment. The city of Oxford is the second most unequal place in the UK (source: [Cities Outlook 2022 | Centre for Cities](#)) in terms of income, housing, affordability and life expectancy.

Deprivation drives inequalities across the county, every district has areas that are affected. Contributing factors driving deprivation are:

- **Cost of living**

The cost of living has been rising in the UK and across the world causing a cost of living crisis which means the cost of everyday essentials like energy and food is rising much faster than average household incomes. In the UK, the price for consumer goods and services rose at the fastest rate in four decades in the year to October 2022. This is having a particularly severe effect as there are several different factors pushing up prices, rather than just certain items becoming more expensive.

Good Food Oxford estimate that 8-10% of households in Oxfordshire experience food insecurity, that is between 55,000-69,000 people. The high cost of living in Oxford City, particularly housing, means that in order to “eat well” in line with government healthy eating guidance, a minimum income of £19,911 is required – exceeding the minimum wage, the real living wage and the Oxford living wage. Even

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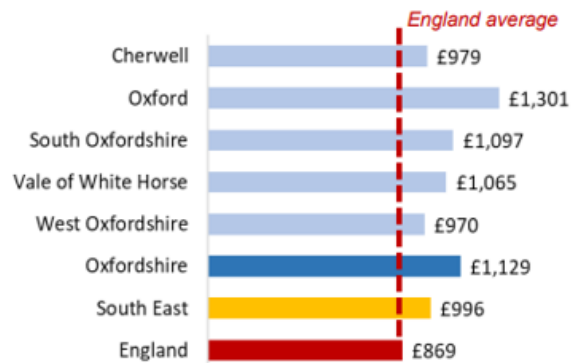
<sup>1</sup> Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – Oxfordshire’s 10 most deprived wards – January 2023

on £19,911, a single person would have to compromise on some items considered in minimum living standards such as socialising or fitness activities (Green, 2019)

- **Cost of housing**

The cost of housing in Oxfordshire is amongst the highest in the country. Oxford is among the least affordable places to live in the UK and first time buyers' face paying nearly 10 times their earnings to buy a home in Oxford. Valuation Office Statistics show the cost to rent in 2021/22 in all districts in Oxfordshire was well above the national average.<sup>2</sup>

**Average rents for a 2-bed property 2021/22**



Whilst there is a buoyant private rental market, rents are not only above the national average but are typically well above the amount paid by Housing Benefit of Universal Credit. An inclusive economy requires affordable housing for low income households.

- **Low income**

Average earnings in Oxfordshire are above the national average, however when you factor in the cost of living and housing this has a significant impacts on the barriers people face and drives inequalities. A significant number of people in Oxfordshire are earning below the national real living wage, the figures are stark when compared by gender or part-time and full-time.

- **Employment status**

Whilst in Oxfordshire 80% of working age adults (16-65 years old) are in employment compared to the national average 75.7% (end of June 2022).<sup>3</sup> However this means that there are over 87,000 not employed, whilst employment rates have improved following Covid they are still above the levels pre-pandemic. The barriers for this group of people to finding work creates impacts on people with the cycle of deprivation, low income and low aspiration.

- **Low educational attainment**

Training and educational attainment are a fundamental driver of change for making an economy more inclusive. Childhood circumstances have an important effect on a person's future income prospects, analysis from ONS has shown. The analysis suggests that people in the UK who have a low personal education level are nearly five times more likely to be poor in adulthood than those with high personal

<sup>2</sup> Nationwide Property Survey 2022

<sup>3</sup> Oxfordshire Local Skills Dashboard

education levels, once other factors are accounted for. Growing up in a workless household was also identified as an important fact in predicting future poverty.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of the Inclusive Economy Seminars, 22% of Oxford's population was poorly qualified. A significant number of people may not be able to share in local prosperity gains and indeed contribute to them. This will be exacerbated by the changing structure of the economy and jobs created in the future.

- **Poor health**

Deprivation is associated with premature death (before 75 years old) and poorer health, in Oxfordshire the wards with the highest levels of deprivation have the highest likelihood of a poorer healthy life and premature death. 20 years difference between the least deprived and most deprived wards for healthy life. The gap between life expectancy between the least deprived wards in Oxfordshire is 11.5 years for women and 10.9 years for men

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<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics – How do childhood circumstances affect your chances of poverty as an adult?

## **Our Vision, Mission and Principles**

### **Vision**

Oxfordshire creates opportunities and benefits for all communities and people within our region.

### **Mission**

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership is working together to create a more equal and sustainable region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county. We are working to tackle some of our region's biggest problems to create a fairer environment where everyone can contribute and share in our success.

### **Principles**

An inclusive economy can be defined in different ways. The following statements have been used by other organisations.

“Growing prosperity that reduces inequality and is sustainable.” (Plymouth Inclusive Growth Group)

“An Inclusive Economy offers a genuine progressive conceptual frame in which greater consideration is given to social benefits that flow from, and feed into, economic activity.” (CLES- the national organisation for local economies - <https://cles.org.uk/>).

Even these short statements can be impenetrable for some people. While the Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership has not created its own definition of an inclusive economy, there is consensus that the following principles lie at the heart of the Partnership's work:

- Reducing inequality
- Creating opportunity
- Creating benefits for communities and citizens
- Our focus is Oxfordshire – this is a county wide issue

## Our Priorities

We have set up 4 action focused working groups to deliver our vision:

- **Educational attainment** - We are focusing on attainment of GCSE English and Maths as this can create a barrier to moving forward into the next level of skills development.
- **Inclusive Employment** - focuses on both employers and employees. Looking at how organisations can create better pathways into work whilst understanding the barriers people face to accessing employment.
- **Social value and procurement** - Spending money locally, initially from public sector organisations like our councils and our universities, puts money back into the local economy and creates opportunities for local businesses – we are looking at how we can grow the amount of money that is spent within our county, for our county. We are also looking at how the businesses that benefit from this are investing into our local communities, through jobs, training or improving our environment.
- **Place shaping** - Investing in places that need it most. Communities need to be part of our work to ensure that money spent in our county helps address some of our biggest challenges – health, environment, housing – we need to ensure that we can answer these questions - what are the benefits that can be created for local people? How are the benefits of economic activity and growth shared locally?

We will be working with projects across Oxfordshire that the partnership can support, grow or amplify their work as well as creating a repository of case studies, information and signposting related to the inclusive economy.

Our aim is to work together to create a more equal and sustainable region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.

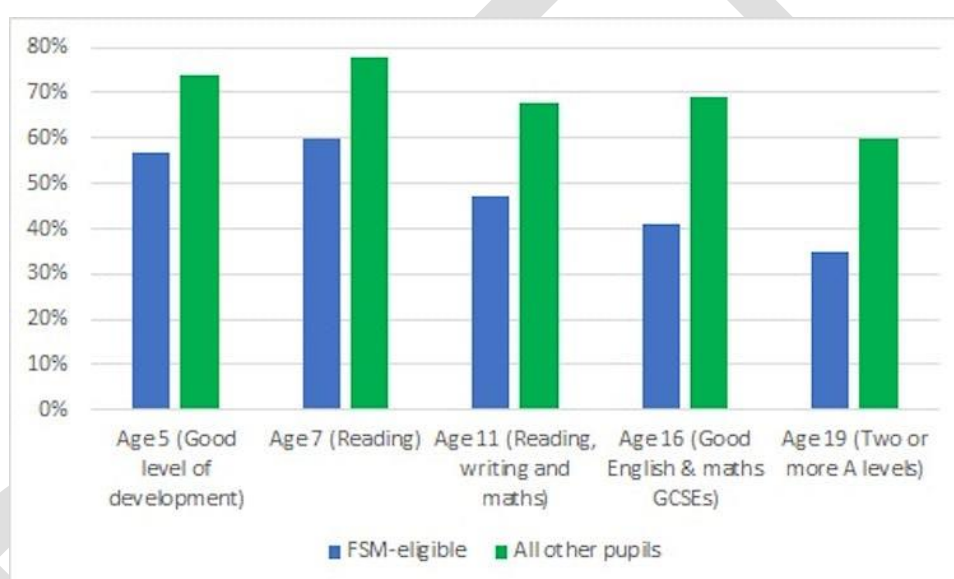
Our focus is on tackling areas that really need attention, which will have impact and will really make a difference.

The working groups seek to find, and build upon, specific initiatives or specialist organisations who are already successful in tackling some of the issues of inclusivity. These initiatives are most likely to be focused on how we can grow capacity or reach of such programmes by gaining support (whether in kind, in funding, or by way of making connections) of our Membership, and others.

## Educational Attainment

Differences in educational attainment emerge early in childhood and develop throughout an individual's lifetime. Even prior to beginning school, there are differences in children's cognitive and socio-emotional skills. During the school years, these educational inequalities crystallise; only 8% of young people who were not meeting expectations in reading, writing and maths at the end of primary school went on to achieve pass grades in GCSE English and maths.

The graph below shows that children who are eligible for free school meals (which corresponds to roughly the 15% poorest pupils) in England do significantly worse at every stage of school.<sup>5</sup>



*Attainment gaps between students eligible and not eligible for free school meals at different stages of the education system, 2019. IFS Education inequalities report, Imran Tahir, Research Economist*

Despite decades of policy attention, there has been virtually no change in the 'disadvantage gap' in GCSE attainment over the past 20 years. Whilst GCSE attainment has been increasing over time, 16 year olds who are eligible for free school meals are still around 27% less likely to earn good GCSEs than less disadvantaged peers. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds also make slower progress through secondary school: in the 2019 GCSE cohort, just 40% of disadvantaged children who achieved the expected level at age 11 went on to earn good GCSEs in English and Maths, compared with 60% of their non-disadvantaged peers. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly worsened overall outcomes as well as widening inequalities. The share of pupils leaving primary school meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarks fell from 65% in 2018-19 to 59% in 2021-22. Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds may have fallen twice as far behind as the average child.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Tahir, I. (2022). The UK education system preserves inequality – new report [Comment] The Conversation. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/uk-education-system-preserves-inequality-new-report>

<sup>6</sup> C, Farquharson and S, McNally and I, Tahir. (2022). *Education inequalities*. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/education-inequalities>.



Following a series of [Inclusive Growth Seminars](#) across 2019 and 2020 a [report](#) was published with a series of recommendations on next steps. One priority area for the inclusive economy agenda in Oxfordshire was identified as ‘more targeted investment in better educational attainment, skills-based training, and access to jobs in the new economy.’ Talent development and the ability to empower local residents to gain the skills needed to compete and access new forms of employment are critical to opening up opportunities to enable them to reach their goals. Support at every stage of learning, including early education interventions, with an effective pathway into employment requires a more proactive skills and education system with more engaged business leadership. There is a challenge to develop awareness of opportunities in new sectors for young people – whether that be technology or services taking into consideration targeted initiatives to help people excluded from the workforce to overcome barriers to jobs.

In September 2020 the [Oxford Strategic Partnership](#) held an Education Summit that brought together interested parties to discuss how to add value to educational attainment work across Oxfordshire. A working group was proposed to take some of the ideas raised forward. This working group came together under the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership whose work was relaunched in March 2021 to take forward the recommendations from the Inclusive Growth Seminars.

The working group have considered ***‘How might we improve educational attainment in Oxfordshire so that more 16-year-olds are aspirational and level 3 ready?’*** and have identified 9 problem statements:

1. How might Oxfordshire develop a **mentoring scheme** for Young People so that we promote identity, belonging and motivation?
2. How might Oxfordshire better **share key information** between one educational setting and another to improve identity, belonging and motivation?
3. How might Oxfordshire **analyse achievement data** more effectively so that we may identify and prioritise support to tackle disadvantage and discrimination
4. How might Oxfordshire **extend the use of online/offline learning tools** to overcome barriers to educational attainment of GCSE Maths?
5. How might Oxfordshire **develop a framework to extend the voluntary workforce** to support learning, and improve signposting to wider support?
6. How might Oxfordshire **more effectively bring together all agencies to identify much earlier those Young People who are struggling in their educational journey?**
7. How might Oxfordshire plan training and awareness to become a more **Trauma Informed County?**
8. How might Oxfordshire **train and develop teachers to have increased awareness of the everyday challenges facing young people** so that they can build better and more meaningful relationships that impact the learner experience?
9. How might Oxfordshire **grow the parent advocate model**, actively listening to more parents and responding to their issues and insights?

## Inclusive Employment

UK unemployment is at its lowest rate for years and overall employment rates for women and young people are rising<sup>7</sup>, however people furthest from the labour market are still being left behind.

Youth unemployment is still high. People with disabilities still struggle to gain employment<sup>8</sup> and ex-military personnel are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as civilians<sup>9</sup>. People with criminal convictions are still widely discriminated against and, despite having the right to work, refugees face barriers in terms of qualifications, language and documentation.<sup>10</sup>

The Social Mobility Commission's 2018-19 State of the Nation report<sup>11</sup> showed that people from working-class backgrounds still face the highest level of unemployment and many people are barred from jobs because they lack qualifications.

The UK has the 7th most unequal incomes of 30 countries in the developed world and this inequality has an impact on the UK's economic stability, educational attainment, crime, health and happiness.<sup>12</sup>

Our focus is on both encouraging employers to be more inclusive and helping specific groups of potential employees who are more likely to experience barriers to accessing employment such as migrants/refugees, people aged 16-25 and 50+, people returning to work after a long break and BAME.

Creating opportunities for individuals in our county creates opportunities for businesses and for employers, including growing the local labour market with improved skills and access to a greater diversity of talent and capabilities.

The adoption of inclusive recruitment policies can prove beneficial to employers as well as employees by maximizing an innovative workforce. An inclusive recruitment strategy gives companies an edge over competitors and makes them an employer of choice.

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<sup>7</sup> ONS – Employment in the UK: May 2023-

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/employmentintheuk/latest>

<sup>8</sup> UK Parliament Research Briefing – Disabled people in employment - [Disabled people in employment - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> The Royal British Legion, A UK Household Survey of the ex-Service community, (2014), pg 64

<sup>10</sup> ResearchGate – Challenging Barriers to Employment for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in London - [\(PDF\) Challenging Barriers to Employment for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in London \(researchgate.net\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> Social Mobility Commission – State of the Nation 2018-19 - [State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> The Equality Trust - <https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/about-inequality>

## Social Value and Procurement

The Social Value Act came into force in January 2013. Social value is defined through the Public Services (Social Value) Act (2013) which requires all public sector organisations and their suppliers to look beyond the financial cost of a contract to consider how the services they commission and procure can improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of an area. The Act aims to encourage wider public benefits for communities beyond the service being commissioned. Organisations are encouraged to use procurement to achieve wider financial and non-financial outcomes, including improving wellbeing of individuals, communities and the environment by making social value a decision-making criterion when awarding contracts.

The Buy Social Corporate Challenge was launched in 2016 by Social Enterprise UK with the ambition of a group of high-profile businesses aiming to collectively spend £1 billion with social enterprises through their procurement within 2 years. After six years they had collectively achieved £255 million, which highlights the challenges those involved have experienced trying to implement the initiative.

Leveraging supply chains at all levels, across all sectors, whether large private, public and voluntary sector organisations with significant spending power, or smaller businesses, opens significant opportunities to support the work of the OIEP. This has largely been driven by the Social Value Act being increasingly embraced by public bodies, leveraging public sector spending. However, this has since developed through anchor institution procurement and significantly, for a range of reasons offers significant benefits increasing this through mainstream private sector spending. Despite some very powerful exemplars locally, there is a lack of awareness of these benefits and opportunities, and where there is awareness, challenges have been identified that prevent this from realising the full value from this opportunity.

Many if not all the challenges the OIEP are seeking to address can be directly supported by organisations making commitments as part of their procurement and supplier agreements. For example, through finding ways in which they are or could be employing a diverse and inclusive workforce, supporting local educational initiatives, or people and organisations operating in specific local areas of deprivation to address challenges there.

## Place Shaping

Developing an inclusive economy is an issue for all places: urban and rural. Place-based working is a person-centred, bottom-up approach used to meet the unique needs of people in one given location by working together to use the best available resources and collaborate to gain local knowledge and insight. By working collaboratively with the people who live and work locally, it aims to understand needs and priorities and to deliver solutions from a local perspective, taking an asset-based approach that seeks to highlight the strengths, capacity and knowledge of all those involved.

The OIEP place based working group has carried out an exercise looking at the correlation between deprivation, educational attainment and economic inclusion /employment for people aged 16-24 and 45 years plus cohorts across Oxfordshire. The exercise highlighted the following areas as of highest need:

- Cherwell: Banbury: Grimsbury/Bretch Hill/Neithrop
- Oxford City: Blackbird Leys/Rose Hill/Barton
- South & Vale: Didcot
- West Oxfordshire: Witney

Additional work has been carried out to drill down into the data by ward level as well as looking at the protected characteristics for each of the 8 identified areas.

## Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter

OIEP have developed a Charter which is a way for employers to demonstrate support for and commitment to making Oxfordshire a fairer and more inclusive place to live and work.

The priorities of the Charter are to promote action via pledges which organisations will sign up to. The Charter and pledges recognise the importance and value of supporting an inclusive economy across Oxfordshire. By taking action on the pledges organisations will show a commitment to improving all aspects of social mobility and increased prosperity for both our communities and residents.

Employers can choose pledges that are relevant for their own organisations from 6 groups:

- Provide fair wages – *ensuring employees have a fair and decent wage*
- Support local and social economy – *using our buying power to support the local economy and maximise social value*
- Opportunities to work – *supporting those furthest from the labour market on their journey towards secure employment*
- Sharing resources, skills and assets – *practical ways to ensure goods and services are accessible to all*
- Recruit inclusively – *making jobs accessible for all residents and hiring from diverse communities*
- Improve training and educational attainment – *creating workplaces where employees can thrive and grow and supporting education programmes for children*

**Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter**

Actively supporting inclusivity across Oxfordshire's economy will generate real benefits for your organisation. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors are increasingly being considered by employees, customers, funders, investors, and partners. Participating in the work of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, through the pledges you make within this Charter, provides a way of demonstrating your commitment to social issues:

- Promoting your role in Oxfordshire's inclusive economy work will help you to attract people to work with you.
- Accessing the widest pool of talent will support growth and productivity within your company or organisation.
- Purchasing from local suppliers and supporting your staff to undertake volunteering activities within the community will contribute to well-being and a sense of loyalty among your employees, differentiating your organisation from competitors.

Joining the work of the Partnership is not only a good thing to do, but it will make a difference to your business too.

By signing this Charter, you are demonstrating your support for and commitment to making Oxfordshire a fairer and more inclusive place to live and work.

### Charter pledges

As a group of employers, we recognise the importance and value of supporting an inclusive Oxfordshire. We are committed to improving all aspects of social mobility and increasing shared prosperity for both our communities and residents by taking action on these pledges:

- Improve training and educational attainment**  
Creating workplaces where employees can thrive and grow and supporting educational programmes for children
- Recruit inclusively**  
Making jobs accessible for all residents and hiring from diverse communities
- Offer opportunities into work**  
Supporting those furthest from the labour market on their journey towards secure employment
- Support local and social economy**  
Using our buying power to support the local economy and maximise social value
- Provide fair wages**  
Ensuring employees have a fair and decent wage
- Sharing resources, skills and assets**  
Practical ways to ensure goods and services are accessible to all

## **Our Approach**

### **Collaborative**

The OIEP is seeking to support, grow or amplify specific initiatives or specialist organisations who are already successful in tackling the issues around the inclusive economy as well as identifying any gaps.

### **Data Led**

We will take a data-led approach ensuring we identify the data available for each area. This will enable collation and processing in a meaningful way so we are able to establish baselines and performance indicators that we would be able to track and measure against what success looks like. We will need to consider a mixture of quantitative data and qualitative data, including narrative and case studies.

### **Person Centred**

By taking a person centred approach we will enable a greater level of success in achieving a more inclusive economy for Oxfordshire.

Person-centred approaches ensure that we see people as unique individuals with valuable gifts and contributions. Person-centred practices can be seen as a 'toolbox' or variety of ways to listen to and gather information with people.

## Measuring Success

We will continually review our activities and progress against agreed outcomes.

We will produce an annual impact report on the delivery of the Charter and the partnership.

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