



Oxfordshire
Inclusive
Economy
Partnership

Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership

Annual report

January 2025-March 2026

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Co-Chairs' Foreword

This past year has marked an important stage in the continued development of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership. As a cross-sector collaboration, the OIEP exists to bring organisations together around a shared ambition: creating an economy that works for everyone in Oxfordshire. Throughout 2025–2026, we have seen growing evidence that this collaborative approach is not only valued, but increasingly essential in addressing complex, interconnected challenges.

Across the county, inequalities in opportunity, health, and access to good work remain significant. At the same time, Oxfordshire continues to be a globally competitive and innovative economy. Bridging this gap—ensuring that the benefits of growth are more fairly shared—requires coordinated, practical action. This is where the Partnership has focused its efforts.

Over the past year, we have strengthened our role as a convener, connector and catalyst for change. We have brought together partners from business, local government, education, health, and the voluntary sector to translate shared ambition into tangible activity. From the Early Years Summit, which highlighted the importance of early intervention in shaping lifelong outcomes, to the continued development of the OIEP HR Network, we have seen partners engage openly with challenges and commit to practical solutions.

Our work on inclusive employment has continued to grow, supporting employers to better understand and address barriers faced by groups including care leavers, prison leavers, and refugees. At the same time, we have strengthened collaboration through the Oxfordshire Anchor Network, recognising the important role that major institutions play in shaping local economies through their employment, procurement, and investment decisions.

The OIEP Charter remains central to this work. With more than 100 organisations now signed up, it provides a shared framework for action and accountability. Encouragingly, we are seeing increasing momentum, with organisations not only making commitments but actively working together to deliver them.

This year has also been one of transition. We would like to express our sincere thanks to Baroness Jan Royall, whose leadership as a founding Co-Chair has been instrumental in shaping the Partnership. Her vision and commitment to inclusion have left a lasting legacy. We are delighted to welcome Professor Julia Black as Co-Chair, whose experience and insight will help guide the Partnership into its next phase.

Looking ahead, our priority is to build on this momentum. The challenges we face—whether it's supporting children and young people, access to employment, or creating greater social value through procurement—cannot be addressed by any single organisation acting alone. They require sustained partnership, shared learning, and a willingness to take collective action.

We would like to thank all our partners for their continued commitment, energy, and collaboration. It is through this shared effort that we are making progress towards a more inclusive Oxfordshire.



Professor Dame Julia Black
Co-Chair, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership



Jeremy Long
Co-Chair, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership

Highlights of the year

This year the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership has continued to bring organisations together across the county to focus on practical action as well as shared ambition.

We were pleased to convene an [Early Years Summit](#), bringing together practitioners, researchers, employers and system leaders to focus on how the earliest years shape long-term outcomes for children, and how partners across different sectors can work more effectively together to support families in Oxfordshire.

Through the Creating Opportunities through Local Innovation Fellowships (COLIF) programme, we worked with academic and system partners to translate research and lived experience into practical guidance for action. This culminated in the publication of [Partnering for Inclusive Employment: A Guide for Local Economies](#), which sets out approaches that organisations can use to improve access to employment and reduce inequality.

We also continued to develop the **OIEP HR Network**, hosting two focused events on supporting people furthest from the labour market and [improving pathways into employment for care leavers](#). These sessions created space for employers to share experience, hear directly from partners, and consider practical changes to recruitment and workforce practices.

Alongside this, we supported the continued development of the **Oxfordshire Anchor Network**, working with major local institutions to explore how their role as employers, commissioners and long-term place-based organisations can better support inclusive growth across the county.

OIEP has also continued to contribute to wider county and regional initiatives, working with partners including Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership (ZCOP), Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP), the Oxford Growth Commission, Marmot Steering Group, Early Years Board, South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO), Equinox, and the Chief Scientific Advisers to align work on inclusive growth, green skills, early years, and health inequalities.

The year also saw a change in leadership in the partnership. We said farewell to Baroness Jan Royall, and thanked her for her role in establishing and shaping the OIEP since its early development. We were pleased to welcome Professor Julia Black as Co-Chair, bringing continuity and further academic and civic insight to the Partnership.

Taken together, these developments reflect a continued shift towards more joined-up working across organisations in Oxfordshire, with a focus on turning shared priorities into practical steps.

Thank you to Baroness Jan Royall



With great warmth and gratitude we would like to say thank you to Baroness Jan Royall.

Jan co-founded the OIEP and, from the very beginning, has been a driving force behind our development. A tireless advocate for equality and inclusion, her leadership and passion have been at the heart of the Partnership's achievements, helping to shape a bold, collaborative approach to tackling inequality in Oxfordshire.

While this is a natural end to her time as co-chair following her departure as Principal of Somerville College, her impact on the OIEP will continue to be felt for years to come.

As her fellow Co-Chair Jeremy Long said:

"On behalf of the whole Partnership, our heartfelt thanks go to Baroness Royall, who co-founded the OIEP and has been a driving force behind its development. A tireless advocate for equality and inclusion, Jan's leadership and passion have been at the heart of the Partnership's achievements and have helped shape a bold, collaborative approach to tackling inequality in Oxfordshire."

We are hugely grateful to Jan for her vision and dedication - and we look forward to building on the strong foundations she has helped to create. We're delighted that Professor Julia Black will be stepping into the role of Co-Chair, and we'll be sharing more about her and her priorities for the Partnership very soon.

Welcome to our new Co-Chair – Dame Julia Black



We're thrilled to welcome Professor Julia Black as the new Co-Chair of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, succeeding Baroness Jan Royall as her term at Somerville College concludes.

Julia brings a remarkable blend of experience in academia, public service, and policy leadership. As Warden of Nuffield College, Professor of Law and Regulation at the University of Oxford, a Non-Executive Director at the Financial Conduct Authority, and a member of the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology, her leadership and insight are exceptionally well aligned with our mission.

Professor Black shared:

"The University and Colleges are an important component of Oxfordshire's local economy, and I am delighted to be taking on this role with the OIEP and sharing its endeavour to create a more inclusive and equitable region."

With our ongoing collaboration of over 100 organisations across business, education, government, and civil society, we're confident that Julia's leadership will inspire new momentum and impact as we continue building a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable economy for all in Oxfordshire.

Overview

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) is a cross-sector partnership working to create a fairer and more inclusive economy across Oxfordshire.

Established in 2021, the Partnership brings together employers, local authorities, health, universities, voluntary organisations, education providers, and community groups to tackle shared challenges and improve opportunities for residents across the county.

At the centre of this work is the OIEP Charter, launched in 2023, which supports organisations to embed social value into their day-to-day operations and decision-making. More than 100 organisations have now signed the Charter, including all six Oxfordshire local authorities, NHS partners, major employers, and community organisations.

This year, the Partnership has continued to focus on four interconnected areas:

- Children and young people
- Inclusive employment and removing barriers to work
- Social value and procurement
- Place-based approaches to inclusive growth

Across these themes, the OIEP brings organisations together to share ideas, build partnerships, and work collaboratively on issues that no single organisation can address alone. We help connect people and projects, support the sharing of knowledge and good practice, and highlight opportunities to increase the impact of work already happening across Oxfordshire.

We work with projects and organisations across the county that are helping to build a more inclusive economy, supporting them to grow, connect with others, and reach a wider audience. We are also developing a library of resources, case studies, and practical guidance to help organisations learn from each other and take action in their own work.

This report gives an overview of OIEP and highlights progress January 2025-March 2026. Going forward the OIEP annual reports will be based on the financial year.

VISION

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

MISSION

Together providing opportunities for every person in Oxfordshire.

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.

The OIEP's work supports the delivery of Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Long-Term Sustainable Development, which all of Oxfordshire's six councils have adopted.

PRINCIPLES

These four principles lie at the heart of the Partnership's work:

- Reducing inequality
- Creating opportunity
- Creating benefits for communities and citizens
- Focusing on Oxfordshire

FOCUS AREAS

We have set up four action focused working groups to deliver our vision.

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. We focus on how we can grow the capacity or reach of these programmes by providing support (whether in kind, in funding, or by way of making connections) from our members and affiliated organisations.



Children & Young People - focuses on supporting organisations and initiatives that improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly through early intervention and community support.



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, particularly by large public sector organisations like our councils and our universities, puts money back into the local economy and creates opportunities for local businesses – we aim to grow the amount of money that is spent within our county, for our county



Place shaping - investing in places that need it most and working with local communities so that money spent in our economy helps address our biggest challenges in health, environment, and housing.

Supporting delivery of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire

The [Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire](#) sets out ambitions for what the county could be like by 2050. It has been adopted by each of the Oxfordshire Councils. The nine outcomes within the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision are ambitious - delivering them requires long-term collective commitment and investment by a wide array of strategic stakeholders and partners who make decisions about investment and placemaking across Oxfordshire.



The nine outcomes of the Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development in Oxfordshire.

The Partnership particularly focuses on the following three outcomes:

Outcome: Our residents will be healthier and happier, and overall wellbeing will have improved The OIEP improves skills and educational attainment for Oxfordshire residents, which in turn gives people access to employment opportunities.

Outcome: Our local economy will be globally competitive, sustainable, diverse and inclusive The OIEP's education and inclusive employment working groups are working to create an environment and communities that can adapt to change, a region that is resilient in the face of shocks in the economy, and a workforce that responds to different needs and different kinds of work in the future.

Outcome: Our vibrant historic and cultural offer will be rich, diverse and enhanced The OIEP's partners work together to create a more equal region that creates opportunities and benefits for all people within the county.

Achievements

The OIEP charter

The Charter is at the heart of the OIEP's work. It drives progress towards the partnership's goals by uniting organisations around a shared commitment to creating a fairer, more inclusive economy.

We are delighted that more than **100 organisations**, including all six of Oxfordshire's local authorities, Thames Valley Police, and OUH Foundation Trust, have now signed the Charter and are delivering against their commitments.

You can find the charter pledgers on our website.

Signing the Charter demonstrates public accountability and motivates signatories to align their actions with its objectives, such as widening access to quality jobs, providing opportunities for education and skills developments, and spending money locally. The Charter fosters collaboration among organisations, encouraging resource-sharing and joint initiatives while providing a framework for action with clear goals and best practices.



Celebrating Oxford University Development (OUD) being the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter 100th signee, with OIEP Chairs Jeremy Long and Jan Royall.

The OIEP continues to actively drive sign-ups to the Charter, encouraging organisations in Oxfordshire to align with and contribute to the delivery of the partnership's objectives.

Supporting Charter organisations

The OIEP works with each organisation throughout the 12 months providing bespoke support with the implementation of pledges dependent on requirements - this could be signposting to relevant information or buddying with an organisation that has already implemented that pledge.

FOCUS AREA: Children and Young People

OIEP's work on children and young people focuses on supporting organisations and initiatives that improve outcomes for children and young people, particularly through early intervention and community support.

This year included continued support for ARCh, a charity that helps children improve reading confidence and literacy through volunteer support in schools. Partnership support for their funding bid contributed to successful allocation of resource that enabled ARCh to expand its volunteer coordination capacity, increasing the number of children receiving support.

The partnership has also continued working alongside Growing Minds and wider system partners to strengthen understanding of the importance of early years development and school readiness.

This work has included collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council, health partners, universities, and employers to position early years support as a long-term investment in wellbeing, educational outcomes, and future employment opportunities.

In January 2025, OIEP hosted an Early Years Summit bringing together practitioners, academics, employers, and policy leaders to explore the question: "Why do they matter, and what we can do"

The event highlighted growing evidence that experiences in early childhood have a major influence on later outcomes including educational attainment, mental health, employment, and life expectancy.

This year the previous educational attainment working group has been restructured into two focused strands: Children and Young People. This change was made to better reflect the different needs, stages, and priorities across the education system, and to allow for more targeted collaboration and delivery across early years, school-age children, and young people facing disadvantage and system barriers transitioning into further education, training, or employment. We are delighted to welcome the new Chairs of the two focus areas:



Early Years and Primary:
Donna Husband,
Public Health, Oxfordshire County Council



Youth Futures:
Emmy O'Shaughnessy
Oxfordshire Youth

CASE STUDY Children and Young People

Early Years Summit – “Why they matter and what we can do”

In January 2025, OIEP hosted a landmark Early Years Summit at Saïd Business School, bringing together over 100 delegates from across health, education, childcare, local government, business, and the voluntary sector.



The summit created a shared space for partners to focus on a simple but critical question: how Oxfordshire can better support children in their earliest years, when outcomes in health, learning, and later employment are most strongly shaped.

Participants heard from national experts, academics, and practitioners, alongside local organisations working directly with families and young children. Discussions focused on the evidence that early childhood development has a long-term impact on life chances — including educational attainment, wellbeing, and future employment — and the importance of coordinated action across systems rather than isolated interventions.

A key theme was the need for earlier, more joined-up support for families, particularly in communities where children are already starting school at a disadvantage. Evidence shared at the event highlighted persistent gaps in early development outcomes for disadvantaged children and the long-term implications if these gaps are not addressed.

The summit also explored practical ways to respond, including:

- strengthening collaboration between early years services, schools, health partners, and employers
- improving access to evidence-based early intervention programmes
- making better use of existing community assets and local initiatives
- aligning investment and resources around prevention rather than later-stage intervention

Importantly, the event was not only about sharing research, but about translating evidence into action. Partners discussed how different parts of the system can work more effectively together to improve outcomes for children and families across Oxfordshire.

Following the summit, work is underway with partners to build on the insights shared and develop next steps, including identifying opportunities for joint action and strengthening early years collaboration across the county.

FOCUS AREA: Inclusive Employment

The OIEP supports groups who face barriers to accessing or progressing in employment by facilitating knowledge sharing and creating networks of mutual support.

This work has brought together employers, public services, charities, and people with lived experience to explore practical ways organisations can create more inclusive recruitment and employment practices.

We also welcomed a new Chair, Tom Storey, Storey Consulting.



The OIEP HR Network

The OIEP HR Network provides a forum for employers and HR professionals across Oxfordshire to share learning, hear from experts and community organisations, and discuss inclusive employment challenges.

This year, the OIEP delivered two HR network events:

- **Supporting people furthest from the labour market**, hosted by Fedcap, where employers shared practical approaches to more inclusive recruitment and workforce development.



- **Pathways into employment for care leavers**, hosted by Oxfordshire Youth, where we brought together employers and system partners to explore the specific barriers faced by care-experienced young people and how employers can make recruitment and early careers opportunities more accessible.

The session highlighted simple but important changes employers can make — from application processes to work experience and recruitment pathways — that can significantly improve opportunities for care leavers.

Following on from this HR Network event, Oxfordshire Youth delivered the RISE re-imagined careers fair focused on supporting young people, mainly care leavers, who

are not in education, employment or training (NEET). OIEP supported this event by funding the creation of a [video](#) of the day.

The network has helped create stronger links between employers and organisations supporting underrepresented groups, enabling more direct collaboration and problem-solving.

Supporting prison leavers into employment

Work around prison leavers has continued to develop significantly over the past year.

Employment is widely recognised as one of the most important factors in reducing reoffending and supporting successful resettlement after release from prison. However, many prison leavers face significant barriers accessing work, including gaps in employment history, lack of confidence, housing instability, and employer perceptions.

The partnership manager also became co-chair of the HM Bullingdon Prison Employment Advisory Board in 2025.

OIEP has worked with HM Prison Bullingdon, employers, and community organisations to help address some of these barriers.

This has included:

- supporting employer engagement and awareness raising
- creating opportunities for businesses to learn directly from prison employment specialists
- sharing practical examples of inclusive recruitment approaches
- supporting connections between prison services and local organisations providing transport, digital access, and basic support after release

Several employers have since reported changes to recruitment practices or increased confidence in employing prison leavers as a result of engagement through OIEP activity.

Supporting refugees into employment

The partnership has continued building on its work supporting refugees and asylum seekers into employment.

This year we released a practical toolkit for employers to help improve access to work and strengthen inclusive recruitment approaches. This work was supported by an Oxford University Crankstart intern who the OIEP worked with in 2024-5. You can find the toolkit here: [Supporting refugees and asylum seekers into employment](#).

This work has been developed in collaboration with partners including Aspire, Asylum Welcome, Refugee Resources, Oxford University Hospitals, and the International Rescue Committee.

Oxfordshire Works – A Local Get Britain Working Plan

The development of this plan aligns with the UK Government's Get Britain White Paper, which sets out national ambitions to reduce economic inactivity and improve employment across the country. The white paper also aims to improve integration employment, health and skills initiatives.

The formation of the Plan has been led by Oxfordshire County Council, with collaboration from DWP/JCP and the lead from the Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and West Berkshire ICB, supported by broad stakeholder engagement. The plan aligns with national Get Britain Working ambitions, but targets pockets of need rather than headline employment growth given the county already outperforms the 80% national target. Future reform (e.g., local government reorganisation, devolution opportunities) will further shape delivery as the Plan matures.

The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Steering Group has agreed to act as external partnership board for Oxfordshire Works. The OIEP will provide strategic oversight and be responsible for ensuring the action plan is in place; will have oversight of the initiatives being delivered by partners in pursuit of a more equitable Oxfordshire labour market; and will have the ability to suggest both the alignment of key workstreams and the commissioning of new ones (if budgets are available). OIEP also provides the primary means of engaging with stakeholders across Oxfordshire (although further, deeper engagement with both the private sector and communities is necessary going forward). To further enable OIEP to take this responsibility, Oxfordshire County Council has agreed to provide additional secretariat support.

Wider inclusive employment activity

Additional activity this year included:

- support for Age Without Limits Action Day, promoting age-inclusive employment practices
- engagement with the Civilian Military Partnership Board around employment support for military families and veterans
- development of future work around economically inactive residents and care leavers

Objectives

Theme	Objective	Description	Project Description	RAG	Notes on progress
Inclusive Employment	Focuses on both employers and employees. Looking at how	Refugees - Employer Toolkit	Develop toolkit on website to support employers recruiting refugees with information that Crankstart intern drafted	GREEN	Completed and available on the website: https://www.oiep.org.uk/supporting-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-into-employment

organisations can create better pathways into work whilst understanding the barriers people face to accessing employment.	Care leavers - Employer Toolkit	Develop toolkit on website	AMBER	Content drafted, waiting to be added to website
	Prison leavers - Employer Toolkit	Develop toolkit on website	AMBER	Content drafted, waiting to be added to website
	Refugees - Oxford City of Sanctuary	Delivering employer actions for the Sanctuary action plan	GREEN	Built actions into the OIEP delivery plan and attend Sanctuary meetings
	Prison leavers - Employers day	Book an employers day at Bullingdon Prison for the Autumn	AMBER	Due to the high percentage of remand prisoners currently at Bullingdon and employers day isn't appropriate. Will reassess for 2026.
	Prison leavers - Employment Advisory Board	OIEP representative on Bullingdon Employment Advisory Board	GREEN	Emma Coles is now the Co-Chair of the Employment Advisory Board (EAB) alongside Paul Humpherson from Tap Social
	Get Oxfordshire Working Plan	This working group will be developing responsible for the monitoring of the Get Oxfordshire Working Plan, commissioned from Oxfordshire by central government to deliver a thriving labour market where everyone has the opportunity for good work and to get on in work.	GREEN	Monitoring template developed and there will be a report submitted to the Inclusive Working Group and Steering Group every 6 months.
	OIEP HR Network	Deliver workshops to support employers to change recruitment practices to support people facing barriers accessing employment	GREEN	Held workshops on supporting people furthest from employment and care leavers into employment.
	Volunteer event	Event to provide VCSE organisations the opportunity to have a stall and businesses to meet them and find out about opportunities for volunteering. Opportunity to talk about Match my	RED	There is currently a lack of capacity to deliver this event

			Project and Matchables		
		Inclusive Employment Event	Host an inclusive employment summit for businesses	AMBER	Planning has started and it's aimed to host in Autumn 2026, awaiting identification of resource to support

CASE STUDY Inclusive employment

Breaking down barriers to employment at Blenheim Palace

PLEDGES MADE

- ✓ Support local and social economy
- ✓ Offer opportunities into work
- ✓ Recruit inclusively
- ✓ Improve training and educational attainment
- ✓ Share resources
- ✓ Fair wages

What changes have your organisation introduced?

One of the main changes has been switching on candidate anonymisation for all roles across Blenheim and Pye.

Switching on candidate anonymisation for all roles is an important feature that helps ensure a fair and unbiased recruitment process. By removing personal identifiers such as name, gender, ethnicity, and other demographic information, our hiring managers can focus purely on the candidate's skills, qualifications, and experience.

This supports the elimination of any unconscious biases that may arise based on a candidate's background, age, location etc. It also promotes equal opportunity for all candidates, allowing them to be assessed solely on merit whilst also promoting Diversity, Inclusion and Fairness within the recruitment process. We feel this also increases the likelihood of attracting a more diverse range of applicants. Candidates from underrepresented groups may feel more encouraged to apply, knowing that their personal characteristics won't be a factor in the hiring decision. As a result, we benefit from diverse personalities, which could ultimately lead to a more innovative and well-rounded workforce.

Have there been any challenges and how did you overcome them?

One key challenge is often technology integration. Thankfully our IT team worked with our recruitment platform to link the ATS platforms to our system. We then rolled out the system and offered regular training for staff on how to effectively use the system.

Stakeholders buy-in can also be a challenge, particularly from hiring managers who may feel that anonymisation limits their ability to make informed decisions. Overcoming this challenge requires education and communication about the value of a fair, unbiased recruitment process. By putting this in place we have been able to highlight the importance of the feature, our managers have taken onboard the importance of this and have embraced it.

What positive impact has this made?

The switch to candidate anonymisation has made several positive differences in the recruitment process. By removing personal identifiers, unconscious bias which unfortunately can occur no matter how much training is in place is significantly reduced. Hiring managers are no longer influenced by factors such as name, gender, or ethnicity, allowing for more objective assessments based purely on qualifications and skills.

This approach should also hopefully increase diversity within the applicant pool. With personal characteristics hidden, candidates from underrepresented groups may feel safer and more encouraged to apply. As a result, we will see a more diverse range of candidates, which can lead to a richer and more varied workplace culture.

The process has become more equitable, ensuring that all candidates are evaluated solely on their abilities and experience. This creates a more meritocratic hiring process where opportunities are open to everyone, regardless of their background. Moreover, diverse teams tend to bring different perspectives, leading to more creative problem-solving and innovation. By promoting diversity through anonymisation, Blenheim are positioning themselves for improved performance, creativity, and competitiveness in the market.

Our candidates also benefit from a more positive experience. They feel valued for their skills rather than their demographics, which improves the overall experience of the recruitment process. This can encourage candidates to engage more with us in the future, whether they are ultimately selected for the role or not.

Lastly, by prioritising fairness and inclusivity supports our employer brand. Simply by implementing the anonymisation feature we demonstrate our commitment to diversity.



FOCUS AREA: Social value and procurement

OIEP's social value and procurement work focuses on helping organisations use their spending, recruitment, and investment decisions to create wider social, economic, and environmental benefits for local communities.

This includes encouraging organisations to think not only about what they buy, but also about how procurement decisions can support:

- local employment
- apprenticeships and skills development
- local businesses and social enterprises
- environmental sustainability
- community wellbeing

Shared social value approaches

This year, the working group continued bringing together local authorities, universities, NHS organisations, and other major employers to align approaches to social value across Oxfordshire.

Partners worked collaboratively to develop shared themes and outcomes that organisations can use when designing contracts and commissioning services.

This helps create greater consistency across the county, making it easier for suppliers and community organisations to engage with different public sector bodies.

This year, we chaired and convened the [OIEP Social Value and Procurement Seminar](#) at the Oxford Fire Station in November, bringing together partners to focus on how social value approaches are being embedded across public sector procurement and what more is needed to strengthen alignment across the county.

We also contributed to the **Meet the Buyer** events, OIEP held a workshop 2025 and a follow-on panel session in 2026 in partnership with OSEP, helping employers and commissioners explore practical approaches to inclusive procurement and supplier engagement.



Objectives

Theme	Objective	Description	Project Description	RAG	Notes on progress
Social Value and Procurement	Focusses on 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.	Comms campaign	Complete draft of comms campaign and agree start date	GREEN	Newsletter was shared with members and charter signees, LinkedIn campaign on-going
		Expansion of Social Value Brokerage capacity across the county	Implement social value brokerage business case - use agreed funding from Housing & Growth Deal to provide licences for Match my Project and capacity support	AMBER	Only Oxford City Council has been in a position to access the funding at present, with the other Local Authorities considering using it as a tool for programmes like Community Employment Plans (CEP) or are not in a position at present to adopt it. However, social value outcomes are being delivered across the City and beyond.
		Social value events	OIEP to host a seminar and sessions at Meet the Buyer events	GREEN	Seminar hosted at the Old Fire Station in November 25 and sessions at Meet the Buyer 2025 and 2026 completed
		Develop a social value framework for Oxfordshire	Finalise Oxon TOMs and develop toolkit of templates for organisations to use internally	AMBER	Good progress has been made but capacity has been the biggest barrier to co-ordinating and project managing this work to ensure the benefits of the Oxfordshire Anchor Network can be realised. Funding for an OAN project manager has been secured.

CASE STUDY Social value and procurement

Addressing the Challenge of increasing the amount of social value delivered through procurement activity across the county using Social Value Brokerage

OIEP was successful in securing funding for a social value brokerage platform for Local Authorities across Oxfordshire through the Housing and Growth Deal Fund agreed the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee (OLJC).

One way that suppliers seek to add social value into a contract is to find local projects and causes which they can support, for example by offering professional advice, financial support, employment and training opportunities or volunteer hours. By creating a shared online space, where these contacts can happen, the platform makes it easier for council suppliers and other committed businesses to provide resources and support to local community organisations. It offers a simple and intuitive mechanism for signposting, matching and monitoring the delivery and impact of social value commitments.

Only Oxford City Council has been in a position to access the funding at present, with the other Local Authorities considering using it as a tool for programmes like Community Employment Plans (CEP) or are not in a position at present to adopt it.

The impact of using the social value brokerage platform Match my Project to date:

At March 2026 there were 321 organisations registered, including 231 businesses and 90 community organisations. This represents an increase of 172 (115%) organisations, including 123 (114%) businesses and 41 (120%) community organisations, from January 2025 to March 2026.

At March 2026 there were 43 projects requiring support, 17 completed projects and 28 matches

Match my Project Case studies

Case studies from January 2025 to March 2026 include a project between Intake Talent and Aspire Oxfordshire to support people not in employment, education or training to apply for apprenticeships; a project between Western Williamson and Partners and 8th Oxford Scout Group to provide architectural advice; and a project between Barwood Limited and A2Dominion to donate paint, which is a project being delivered in the South and Vale District Council area.

Anchor network

One of the most significant developments this year has been the continued growth of the Oxfordshire Anchor Network (OAN).

Anchor institutions are large organisations — such as councils, universities, NHS organisations, and major employers — that have a strong local presence and can use their influence, spending power, employment practices, and assets to support local communities.

The Network brings these organisations together around shared priorities including:

- inclusive employment
- social value and procurement
- climate action and green skills
- support for local supply chains and communities

OIEP now hosts the Network and has facilitated workshops and strategic discussions to support joint action across partners.

This work reflects growing recognition that large institutions can play an important role in shaping more inclusive local economies through the decisions they make every day.

Research, knowledge sharing and mutual support

Research and evidence-sharing remain an important part of OIEP's work.

COLIF - Creating opportunities through local innovation fellowships



This year included delivery of the COLIF programme, an inclusive employment research initiative involving universities and system partners, supported through UKRI funding.

The programme explores how organisations and local systems can work together more effectively to improve access to employment and reduce inequality.

Oxford SGD Impact Lab - Addressing Educational Attainment in Oxfordshire: A Focus on Volunteer-Led Literacy & Numeracy



OIEP also worked in collaboration with the Community Impact Lab research focused on voluntary action in primary schools and its contribution to literacy and numeracy outcomes to support the work and direction of our Educational Attainment working group.

The study aimed to understand the current local and national literacy and numeracy support models, identify strategies for boosting volunteer recruitment and retention, and ultimately, address educational inequalities and improve early educational attainment in Oxfordshire. These projects help strengthen the evidence base for inclusive economy work in Oxfordshire while creating stronger links between research institutions and practitioners.

CASE STUDY Research, knowledge sharing and mutual support

COLIF – Creating opportunities through local innovation fellowships

The COLIF programme is a major research collaboration between the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP), UKRI, and academic partners from the Universities of Oxford, Exeter, Cardiff, and others, focused on improving understanding of how inclusive employment works in practice.

The programme brought together researchers and local system partners to explore how employers, public services, and community organisations can work together more effectively to create fairer and more accessible pathways into work. It is based on in-depth local research in Oxfordshire, including stakeholder engagement, interviews, and cross-sector collaboration, with a focus on what enables inclusion to happen in real-world settings rather than in theory alone.

A key outcome of the programme is the publication of “Partnering for Inclusive Employment: A Guide for Local Economies (2025)”, which sets out six practical principles for building more inclusive employment systems. These include approaches such as placing lived experience at the centre of decision-making, adapting policies to local context, and strengthening collaboration across sectors.

The guide is designed to move beyond traditional checklists and instead support organisations to think of inclusion as an ongoing, shared practice across a local economy. It provides a practical framework that employers, policymakers, and community organisations can use to design more inclusive recruitment and employment approaches.

The COLIF programme has helped strengthen collaboration between research institutions and local partners in Oxfordshire, ensuring that academic insight is grounded in real-world practice and can directly inform how organisations improve access to employment and reduce inequality



Raising the OIEP's profile

OIEP has continued to share learning and practice from across Oxfordshire by contributing to and convening a range of events with partners locally, regionally and nationally.

The OIEP was part of the presentation of the Director of Public Health's annual report to Oxfordshire County Council Full Council meeting. The report – A Stitch in Time – Supporting the mental wellbeing of young people today to improve their prospects for tomorrow highlighting the importance of good and fair employment for young peoples mental wellbeing.

This year, we chaired and convened the [OIEP Social Value and Procurement Seminar](#) at the Oxford Fire Station in November, bringing together partners to focus on how social value approaches are being embedded across public sector procurement and what more is needed to strengthen alignment across the county.

We also contributed to the **Meet the Buyer** events, OIEP held a workshop 2025 and a follow-on panel session in 2026, helping employers and commissioners explore practical approaches to inclusive procurement and supplier engagement.



OIEP presented the **COLIF programme** at the **University of Oxford Social Sciences Conference in March**, sharing findings from the research on inclusive employment and contributing to wider academic and policy discussion on place-based approaches to labour market inequality.

We participated as a panellist at **OBS 2025 in May**, and at the **Climate Solutions Conference – Ashes to Action in June**, where we contributed to discussions on the links between climate action, skills, and inclusive growth.



Oxfordshire Business Summit 2025 | 18

36%
Challenges said that the biggest challenge that they are currently facing is a skilled labour shortage

Session Overview

This session explored the pressing issue of future talent shortages in Oxfordshire and how inclusive skills development is key to sustainable regional growth. The conversation focused on how universities, further education (FE) colleges, businesses, and community organisations can collaborate to identify skills gaps, support training, and empower residents to contribute meaningfully to the local economy.

Key Takeaways:

- Growth must benefit all communities, especially in a region with such stark inequalities as Oxfordshire.
- FE colleges are crucial, as they deliver year-round, tailored, practical training that meets business needs and supports individual development.
- Partnerships like Oxford North and Careers show how targeted training changes lives and fosters social mobility.
- Businesses must embrace people-focused strategies, including apprenticeships, inclusive recruitment, and internal upskilling.
- Human, values-driven leadership better meets the expectations of modern workforces and supports retention.

Actions & Reflections:

- Invest in local partnerships that widen access to training and career opportunities, particularly for underrepresented groups.
- Recognise the strategic value of further education in delivering workforce-ready skills year-round.
- Embed inclusive recruitment practices, such as anonymised applications and alternative entry routes like apprenticeships.
- Encourage businesses to align people strategies with long-term growth goals, focusing on internal mobility, mentoring, and retention.
- Redefine leadership cultures - modern workforces respond best to empathetic, purpose-driven management styles.
- Support leaders with training that fosters vulnerability, adaptability, and a clear sense of mission.

"The population will be far more supportive of growth if they can see it actually affecting them."
Emma Giles, Partnership Manager, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership

In September, OIEP presented at the **Civilian Military Partnership Board**, contributing to discussions on employment pathways and support for military personnel and families.

In November, OIEP co-hosted and contributed to a **ZCOP webinar on simplifying sustainability work experience**, working with partners to explore how employers can make it easier for young people to access meaningful experience in sustainability-related roles.



We hosted the Oxfordshire Women's Network at Somerville College, a quarterly event for women in leadership and women on the journey to becoming leaders.

Taken together, these engagements have supported OIEP's role in sharing practice from Oxfordshire's inclusive economy work, while strengthening connections with partners working across employment, procurement, education, and climate.

Wider engagement across Oxfordshire

Alongside its core programme of work, OIEP has continued to contribute to a range of wider strategic and cross-sector initiatives across Oxfordshire.

This has included engagement with the **Oxford Growth Commission**, supporting thinking on how inclusive growth can be embedded within wider economic development priorities for the county.

OIEP has also worked closely with the **Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership (ZCOP)** and the **Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP)**, strengthening collaboration on shared priorities such as green skills, workforce development, and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The Partnership remains an active member of the **Marmot Steering Group** and the **Early Years Board**, contributing to wider system efforts to reduce inequalities and improve outcomes in health, education, and wellbeing.

OIEP has also engaged with the **South East Strategic Reservoir Option (SESRO)** programme, supporting discussions around inclusive employment, skills development, and social value opportunities linked to major infrastructure investment.

In addition, OIEP has continued to work with the **Equinox team** and with the **Chief Scientific Advisers for early years and inclusive employment**, helping to connect research, policy, and practical delivery across these priority areas.

Looking ahead

Priorities for 2026 include:

- building on the outcomes of the Early Years Summit
- expanding inclusive employment activity focused on care leavers and economically inactive residents
- strengthening collaboration through the Oxfordshire Anchor Network
- continuing work linking inclusive economy and green skills priorities
- developing toolkits for supporting care leavers and prison leavers into employment
- further developing impact measurement and evidence gathering

As activity and engagement continue to grow, maintaining sufficient coordination and delivery capacity will remain important to sustaining momentum and supporting long-term impact.

About the OIEP

Background

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 set of recommendations and actions from a series of workshops and seminars in 2019/20 looking at the state of the inclusive economy in Oxfordshire.

An OIEP Manager started in post in September 2022. The role of the OIEP Manager is to provide strategic and secretariat support working with partners to develop and deliver a long-term programme of activity which will achieve the vision of the OIEP, as well as supporting the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee in delivering the nine outcomes of its Strategic Vision.

Funding and resourcing

The partnership is grateful for the local authority support that facilitates its work. It helps to unlock further resources in the form of project funding and significant in-kind contributions from partners.

This year included successfully funding support for a part-time Oxfordshire Anchor Network project manager through the Housing and Growth Deal Fund, agreed by the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee.

Partners across the county continue to contribute substantial expertise, staff time, venues, communications support, and specialist knowledge to support delivery of the Partnership's work.

Objectives

Theme	Objective	Description	Project Description	RAG	Notes on progress
Resources	To ensure sufficient capacity to deliver against OIEP's vision	Oxfordshire Anchor Network (OAN) Project Manager	Business case for a part time OAN project manager for one year approved by OLJC through Housing & Growth Deal fund	GREEN	Completing HR processes to evaluate role, planned recruitment at start of new financial year
		Charter membership Project Manager	With over 100 charter signees managing the delivery of pledges, engaging and supporting signees, building the community and repository of information and knowledge sharing.	AMBER/RED	Capacity to deliver this to a meaningful level is not possible within the current capacity of the OIEP Manager. It is not clear where this capacity could come from. Oxford City have allocated part of their Economy Projects Officer to support on some of the charter work.

Structure and governance

The OIEP sits under the umbrella of the Oxfordshire Leaders Joint Committee and is governed by a Steering Group which is co-chaired by Professor Dame Julia Black and Jeremy Long. The core functions of the Steering Group are:

- **Strategic oversight and coordination** - agree longer term inclusive economy aims and a rolling programme of work (1-3 years). Ensure projects and activities are joined up and avoid duplication.
- **Prioritise** – continually review and evaluate activities in the wider political and economic context to ensure effort is best placed.
- **Evaluate** – develop measures of success to monitor the county's progress towards an inclusive economy.
- **Support** – provide advice and feedback to inclusive economy Working Groups and look to add value wherever possible.
- **Accountability** – ensure written steering group meeting notes are made publicly available and where required report to other stakeholders such as the Future Oxfordshire Partnership.
- **Collaborate** – share learning and information across partners.
- **Engage** – look for opportunities to communicate and engage with the community to inform current and future priorities of the OIEP
- **Promote** the OIEP's aims and ways in which organisations and individuals can make a difference.