

County Councillor's Report

February/March 2026 – post-Budget

The County Council has set out its Budget. For context:

- The central Government grant leaves the County Council needing to find a minimum of £24.1 million savings by 2028-9 (the first year of new unitary council/s).
- While the required savings of £5.4 million were achievable this year without tangible cuts in services, the council is having to borrow considerable sums (principally to fund highway repairs, for which there is a £15 million shortfall in Government funding - £82 million over the course of this Parliament) and dip into reserves in a way that is not sustainable.
- Savings of around £20 million will need to be found for next year's Budget process, and work will start early on this.

One silver lining concerns SEND. The Government has announced that 90% of the accumulated deficit (which has risen from just over £100 million at the start of the financial year to an estimated £150 million at the end of the year) will be written off.

An additional £2 million capital funding has been allocated to tackling historic drainage issues, some of which have been uncovered by the annual gully clean. An additional £900,000 has been put towards maintenance of pavements, footpaths and cycleways.

FixMyStreet

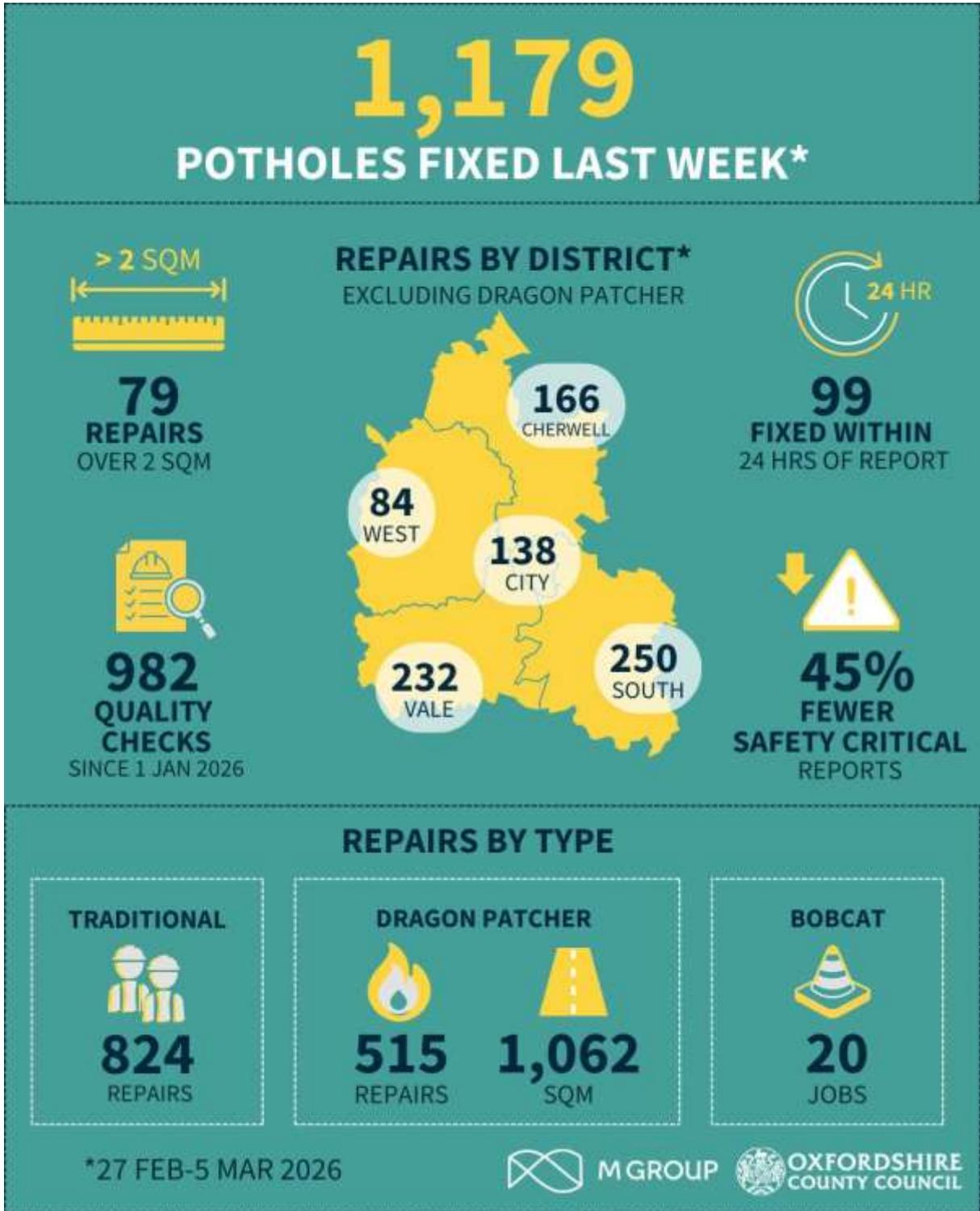
I have completed my training to become a FixMyStreet Super User. This is principally to support the smaller parishes without a current volunteer Super User. While doing onsite training it was notable how a number of large potholes hadn't been reported; as ever I encourage people to log reports on fixmystreet.com and where safe, take and upload photos.

Potholes more broadly....

OCC has taken on extra crews and additional Bobcat and Dragon Patcher machines in order to tackle the significant spike in road defects nationwide from which we're not immune. The relatively drier weather at last should help effect repairs. If there are safety-critical urgent repairs, let me know and I will escalate these with senior officers.

Staff have been redeployed from other teams to inspect highways. This does mean that some responses may be delayed.

These extra crews are largely funded by borrowing. Temporary patches should be replaced by permanent fixes [please let me know if any of these remain outstanding]. Overleaf is the most recent set of weekly figures on what has been done. The numbers are increasing as the weather gets better, though there are undoubtedly still challenges.



Surface dressing programmes are now set for mid-April, with the following roads due for surface dressing:

- Fritwell Road, Somerton
- Somerton Road, North Aston
- Fritwell-Souldern
- East Street, Fritwell
- Duns Tew-Ledwell.

Bicester & Cherwell Villages Movement & Place Plan

Following intensive activity the Plan will go to Cabinet on 17 March. A lot of constructive challenge has been helpfully supplied, and I'm confident that the final version will be considerably better than previous versions.

The final document will be published around ten days before the Cabinet meeting on the [OCC website](#).

Road safety

I've reviewed numerous issues with the Vision Zero team. The speed limit changes on the A4260 [consulted in Autumn 2025] will be made in the coming weeks. There is an ongoing review of all A and B-roads that haven't been reviewed recently – this is relevant to the B4100 for Fritwell and Souldern as well as the A361 in the South Newington area, where there have been a number of recent collisions. I am also discussing some of the busier unclassified roads. In the coming financial year there will be the opportunity to make minor changes to 20mph zones.

Broadband and connectivity

I've had a lot of contact about the lack of mobile phone signal in Deddington and several smaller villages. Concerns have also been raised about the roll-out of fibre broadband. I was delighted to discover that the County Council has an officer dedicated to this subject and have had an initial briefing. Subject to external funding, it is possible that we might be able to take part in a pilot, and I would welcome any interest from parishes with particularly acute issues. I'll cover this subject more fully after I have another meeting, as there are issues of more general interest.

Local government reorganisation [LGR]

The government has commenced the statutory consultation relating to the reorganisation of local government in Oxfordshire.

You will recall that there are three possible options -

- 1) a whole Oxfordshire unitary council
- 2) two unitary councils with West Oxfordshire, Cherwell and City in one unitary and West Berks, South Oxon and Vale of White Horse in another, and
- 3) a three unitary option promoted by the City Council, which would see a Greater Oxford as one unitary, a tiny West and rump of Cherwell one, and a Vale/South/West Berks unitary too.

I have no doubt that a single unitary will deliver the best services and the quickest and highest savings, and avoid breaking up critical social services. It will also have the least effect on what residents pay in council tax and other charges, because it is the option that balances out the substantial additional costs incurred in the City across the widest population.

Other views are available!

The government has published a list of organisations it will consult with, including business groups and the universities, but it would be good for residents and parish councils also to have a say.

Much more info and a link to the consultation here

<https://www.oneoxfordshire.org.uk/>

Scrutiny

I'm a member of a working group of the Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee [HOSC] focusing on GP services in Oxfordshire and the gaps in provision. This has particular relevance due to limited capacity around Bicester and Heyford Park. I'm very happy to take any inputs. I also recently attended a meeting of the Education & Young People committee, which in a report on early years provision highlighted

And back to the budget.....

My colleague Nathan Ley has written a brilliant essay on why road failure was built into changes to government funding and local choices in the past, why it happens every year, and can't be fixed without substantial additional money. It is worth a read.

<https://cllrdrnathanley.substack.com/p/how-the-conservative-party-baked>

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