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OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

To:	**Council**
Date:	3 September 2026
Report of:	Alistair Rush, Group Finance Director
Title of Report:	Additional Funding for Community Improvement Measures

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	Council is asked to approve the proposed draw down of reserves to support the delivery of additional community improvement, democratic transparency and youth employment during 2026 - 2027.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory), and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management
Corporate Priority:	Well-Run Council.
Policy Framework:	Well-Run Council

Recommendation(s): That Council resolves to:
1. **Approve the allocation of funding from reserves for the bringing forward of the recommended investments set out in sections 2, 3 and 4 within the report, totalling £410,000.**

Information Exempt From Publication	
State in here what information is to be exempt from publication – where it is, attach it as an appendix and name the appendix as you describe It here	Not Applicable

Introduction and background

1. Oxford City Council, as a well-run council, has committed to deliver the maximum benefit for all Oxford's residents, businesses and communities within the resources available. In this context, opportunities to support further investment in these communities has been identified. These opportunities represent tangible benefits at a relatively low level of investment. The priorities include those which were prioritised at the formation of the new administration following the 2026 local elections, and other important initiatives subsequently identified by the administration.

Community Investments

2. A number of investments have been identified to support the improvement of community infrastructure and information as follows:
    a. *Public Toilets (£40,000) -* A stock condition survey is being finalised into the council's public toilets which will support a longer-term plan for their maintenance and improvement, in the meantime it is proposed to invest £40,000 during 2026 – 2027 to support their renovation and to deter anti-social behaviour.
    b. *Notice Boards (£60,000)* – investment in the maintenance of notice boards supports the enjoyment of public spaces by residents and visitors and supports the council in making a positive impression. This will complement the current work being undertaken to complete a comprehensive mapping of all the notice boards provided by the council.
    c. *Summertown United Reform Church Community Centre (£50,000)* – this will support the conversion of the building into a community resource which will subsequently facilitate further benefits and opportunities for the community.
    d. *Port Meadow (£5,000)* – in recognition of Port Meadow being one of the largest open spaces in the north of city alongside being part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the European Habitats Directive, there are opportunities to enhance appreciation of its unique natural assets and important contributions to conservation and nature conservation via the provision of public information points.
    e. *Streetscene (£115,000)* – This would add to existing resources with which to enhance the appearance and practicality of street facilities around the city, whether this was in relation to pavement and road improvements, planters or maintaining and enhancing the public realm for example from additional cleaning, improving waste management, improved public hygiene etc., and will also provide the facility to provide a small number of additional bus shelters where there is a pressing need and they are not covered in the new bus shelter contract.
    f. *Targeted free swimming lessons (£40,000 – spread over two years)* – this will provide some free lessons on a targeted basis at city pools, as well as some instructor support at free swimming sessions. Given the importance of improving water safety, this is being prioritised by the administration.

g. *Blackbird Leys Bowls Club* – This would represent undertaking a feasibility study into options for any potential future investment, as such there is an existing capital programme budget to fund such studies, which could be utilised at the appropriate time.

Democratic Transparency

3. The Scrutiny Committee has cross-party membership and carries out a ‘check and balance’ and ‘critical friend’ function to the Cabinet by reviewing policies, decisions and key issues affecting residents. In this way its work provides public assurance that the Cabinet is carrying out its business effectively, providing value for money and taking the best decisions it can to improve public services and the quality of life for the residents of Oxford. To support these roles and responsibilities, a dedicated Scrutiny Officer (£50,000) would provide capacity to undertake research and analysis as directed by the committee. This could potentially be an apprentice role that could attract funding from the growth and skills levy and support a response to the current challenges for those currently not in education, employment or training.

Youth Employment

4. In recognition of the challenges faced by those not in education, employment or training, as highlighted by the recently published Young People and Work: Interim Report (Young people and work: interim report - GOV.UK), whilst also recognising the period of significant change that local government and Oxford is embarking upon with Local Government Reorganisation, an additional apprentice role (£50,000) is proposed to be established, which could potentially also attract funding from the growth and skills levy.

Alternative Options Considered

5. The alternative would be to not make these investments, which total £410,000.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

6. There are no immediate implications for local government reorganisation, since these represent investments on a one-off basis. In the event that the Greater Oxford successor authority wished to extend or continue with these investments, this could be considered when the budget for 2028 – 2029 was being developed and set.

Financial implications

7. If all the recommendations were to be approved, the total investment would be £410,000. The investment would be on a one-off basis but would potentially incur costs across both 2026 – 2027 and 2027 – 2028, recognising that it may be pragmatic to anticipate the investments being made across a twelve month period. In the case of free swimming lessons, this is explicitly to run until the end of the next financial year.
8. Funding for these investments would come primarily from reserves, specifically
    a. Community Services Carry Forward Reserve - £115,000
    b. Risk Reserve - £295,000

It should be noted that the Council's reserve provision is expected to improve by £924k owing to a better-than-expected outturn at the end of the 2025/26 financial year, with these monies being allocated to the Risk Reserve.

Taking account of this, the General Fund Risk Reserve balance at 31 March 2026 is expected to stand at £8.421 million of which two-thirds (£5.594 million) is currently budgeted to be utilised in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) during the period 2026/27 to 2029/30. The Risk Reserve is held to fund and mitigate future risks that may arise and forms part of expected total General Fund Earmarked Reserves of £62.808 million at 31 March 2026.

Legal issues

9. Whilst the report is seeking to allocate finances to support the proposed investments within the report it should be noted that they will each, if implemented, be subject to further potential decisions under executive powers to implement. This may be by officers or cabinet depending on the individual item and value. Further some may require compliance with other processes such as procurement in order to implement. The decision before Council is to allocate funding only.
10. It should also be noted that these investments pertain to the cost of the item in question, as such there will be officer capacity needed to bring these forward in the manner set out above.

    (EJ/91313/25.8.26)

Level of risk

11. If the recommendations are approved, the risk will lie in the implementation of the investments and ensuring that they deliver benefits to residents of Oxford. This risk could potentially be mitigated by requiring the Development Board to oversee their implementation where the investments are capital in their nature. By definition of the funding sources for these investments there is a reduction in the level of reserves held by the council, which represents an opportunity cost in recognition that reserves can only be used once.

Equalities impact

12. The nature of the recommended investments is such that the benefits would be available to all residents and visitors to the city in relation to the community investments, whilst the potential apprentice roles would be recruited to in an equalities' compliant manner. There will be an EQIA in respect of each decision taken to implement as the work progresses.

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Background Papers: List the background documents and, if possible, link to them. All background papers must be listed in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. This includes, any material which discloses facts or matters on which the report or an important part of it is based and which have been relied on in the preparation of the report Each document must be listed and a copy of each document made available to members and the public on request, (or they should be directed where to find it if it is already published on the Council's website). All confidential, exempt, copyrighted and published works are EXCLUDED from this requirement.
1 Not Applicable 2 3 4

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