

Report: August/September 2026

The summer holidays mean that much council activity has slowed. However, a change of Government and a flurry of announcements have kept many colleagues very busy.

News of a further delay to the reopening of Botley Road has generated significant work, delaying improvements to our bus services.

Oxford Traffic Filter trial

This will commence on 28 September for a maximum of 18 months. [Register your vehicle](#) and you'll have 25 free passes annually through the filters if you live in Oxfordshire – worth doing even if you don't think you'll drive into Oxford, in case you forget. There are also a wide range of exemptions. The major difference from the temporary congestion charge is that if you pass through a filter, the ability to pay £5 won't be there. There will be a six-month consultation, also starting on 28 September, to feed into the decision-making following the trial.

EV charging

A consultation for on-street EV charging (including Deddington) has concluded and the results are due to come for member decision in September. The papers have been published for this and over a dozen other locations.

Bus services

I'm delighted that (with considerable local encouragement) we've been able to find a new operator for the 81 Bicester Bee bus serving Somerton, Fritwell and Souldern.

Equally positively, the retender for the bus serving Heyford Park will result in a significant improvement to bus services there. Some of these improvements will be put in place on 20 September to coincide with the Botley Road reopening. There are challenges due to major roadworks on the routes.

Devolution

The new Government has written to county and unitary councils in the Thames Valley asking for expressions of interest in a Mayoral Strategic Authority. This would be much better than the previous proposal of a "Foundation Strategic Authority", not least because it would allow for infrastructure funding through retention of a proportion of business rates. The County Council has written with that in mind. There's a suggestion in the letter that Buckinghamshire may be given no choice when it comes to it, as it's clear the Government wants a mayor to cover all of England.

Local government reform

Work proceeds apace at district and county level. One thing that has become abundantly clear is the scale of triplication that will be involved. Three directors for everything; small, specialist teams (I think of our bus and rail teams) potentially divided in three; etc.

It seems there will be three county councillors per current county division too.

PFAS

There is now a round table discussion taking place involving the EA; formal communication is promised but I am happy to take any questions. I have been asked to ask parishes to identify village “taps” – publicly available local water sources – for CDC to test as part of a wider workstream regarding private water supplies. If parishes can make Neil Whitton at CDC aware of these, that would be helpful.

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