

OCRN NEWSLETTER

July/August 2026

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Oxfordshire Community Research Network (OCRN) NEWS



Celebrating the successful completion of the 2026 Local Policy Lab

By Foyeke Tolani

On 15 July 2026, the achievements of the third cohort of the Oxfordshire Local Policy Lab Fellows were celebrated at the [Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford](#). The Oxfordshire Local Policy Lab (LPL) is a partnership between the [University of Oxford](#), [Oxford Brookes University](#) and [Oxfordshire County Council](#), working together to better understand and address the underlying causes of health inequalities across the county. The Lab focuses on Oxfordshire's three Marmot

County priorities: enabling children and young people to thrive; delivering inclusive growth, a skilled workforce and fair employment; and addressing inequalities and ensuring a healthy standard of living for all. One of the Lab's flagship initiatives is its annual Fellowship programme which enables graduate students to work alongside council officers, academic mentors and the Lab's three Chief Scientific Officers on live policy challenges affecting people in Oxfordshire. This year's eight projects generated practical insights and recommendations to help strengthen community engagement and improve service delivery across the county.



Community researcher training

By Katharine Howell

Building on the success of the co-produced [Community research: how to guide](#), Healthwatch Oxfordshire convened two skills training workshops, enabling participants to put the guide into practice. During two interactive, hands-on workshops at Rose Hill Community Centre, 15 aspiring community-based researchers worked through the 9 steps of community research, supporting each other to develop their own ideas for community research projects. Participants also shared ideas and built peer support relationships over shared lunch, with delicious food provided by OCA Kitchen.

The training was funded by Oxford Brookes University as part of its support for OCRN, organised by Healthwatch Oxfordshire and facilitated by Nigel Carter of Oxford Community Action, Makena Lohr, and Katharine Howell from Healthwatch Oxfordshire. Together, we are now working to plan and develop ongoing support for community researchers as they put what they have learned into action.

We were excited to hear people's varied and important ideas for community research projects including fitness and swimming for women from global majority communities, mental health support for people with experience of homelessness and access to arts and culture for people from the global majority living in rural areas.

We will be running more community research training sessions for grassroots community members this autumn. If you would like to take part, please email hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk to register your interest!

OPPORTUNITIES

Community research: Stories about brain health and ethnicity (Oxford SABHEE Study)

The Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, would like to interview members of the South Asian community to understand how positive and negative experiences of living in the UK contribute to brain health. They hope this knowledge will improve the management of diseases, such as dementia, in South Asian adults. If you decide to take part, you will have a friendly one-to-one conversation with a researcher and complete a short questionnaire about your general health. You can choose whether the interview takes place online or in person. The study visit will last up to two hours, with contributors being paid for their time. [>>>](#)

Community research: Help shape research on healthy ageing

Researchers from the Age Well Theme of the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration (ARC) Thames Valley are looking for 8–10 people to join their Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE) Advisory Group. They are looking for adults aged 40 and over, living with one or more long-term health conditions, from the Thames Valley area, and with an interest in research. Participants' time will be reimbursed. If you are interested, please contact [Dr Megan Kirk Chang](#).

Event: Local Policy Lab findings on Good Level of Development (GLD) in Oxfordshire

Date: 7 August 2026

Time: 11:00–12:00

Location: [online](#)

As part of the 2026 Local Policy Lab, two research fellows from Oxford Brookes University and the University of Oxford have analysed Good Level of Development (GLD) data from 2024/2025 in Oxfordshire. In this open, online meeting, they will present the findings of their research, explain the areas of the county where children do not achieve GLD and discuss their recommendations.

Event: ROBIN Networking Event

Time: 16:00–18:00

Date: 17 September 2026

Location: Low Carbon Hub

The Responsible Oxfordshire Business Involvement Network (ROBIN) connects businesses, charities, and communities across Oxfordshire. This event allows members to connect with the Low Carbon Hub, one of the county's leading social enterprises driving the transition to a zero-carbon future. [>>>](#)

Event: End-of-life and palliative care

Time: 13:00–14:00

Date: 15 September 2026

Location: online

Healthwatch Oxfordshire's forthcoming webinar will feature guest speakers from Community Nursing, Oxford Health, and Oxford University Hospitals. Speakers will talk about what their services offer, and the importance of early conversations about end-of-life wishes and advanced care planning. [>>>](#)

Funding: Democratic Engagement Fund

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has launched a new £2.5 million Democratic Engagement Fund to support politically neutral, community-based projects in England that help people understand and take part in democracy. The fund is aimed at civil society organisations working with communities that are less likely to engage with democratic processes, including young people aged 5 to 25, ethnic minority communities, people who are homeless, regular movers, disabled people and people from low socio-economic backgrounds. Around 80 to 100 projects are expected to receive funding, with most grants worth up to £25,000 and up to £50,000 available in exceptional cases. Projects could include democracy workshops, outreach in community settings, mock elections, community forums or practical support to remove barriers. The application window opens on 22 June 2026 and closes on 31 August 2026. [>>>](#)

Funding: GSK IMPACT Awards and GSK Community Health programme applications

GSK IMPACT Awards provide funding, training and development for larger charities doing excellent work to improve people's health and wellbeing. Up to 15 awards will be made, ranging from £5,000 to £50,000. The deadline for stage one applications is 17:00 on Wednesday 19 August 2026. The GSK Community Health programme is supporting smaller charities tackling health inequalities. Up to 10 charities will receive up to £10,000 plus access to training and development valued at £5,000. The deadline for applications is 17:00 on Monday 10 August 2026. [>>>](#)

COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Healthwatch Oxfordshire's Annual Impact Report – 30 July 2026

The report showcases Healthwatch's achievements over the last year and highlights some of the ways in which it has made a difference to local health and care services. An online event was held to present the report and celebrate Healthwatch's work in 2025–26. An 'easy read' summary of the report is also available. [>>>](#)

Well Together focus group learnings - undated

As part of the Well Together programme, the voices and experiences of people taking part in funded activities were captured through a series of focus groups: [Syrian Sisters](#), [Iraqi women, art and war](#) and [Chair yoga](#). [>>>](#)

'They treat us as experts in our own abilities.' – 23 April 2026

A case study from Charlbury-based SpecialEffect shows how they have supported Becky, aka EyeGazeGirl, to enjoy computer games for over a decade. Becky has quadriplegic cerebral palsy which, she says, 'makes playing video games quite difficult as I can't walk or stand or use my arms.' Becky's 60 second video is one of the many responses to the call for [GameBlasters](#) to take a minute to share why they love accessibility and inclusivity in gaming. [>>>](#)

IN THE NEWS

Oxfordshire confirmed to be bucking regional trend on road safety – 3 August 2026

Newly confirmed government statistics suggest that Oxfordshire is seeing significant improvements in road safety, with serious and fatal collisions falling sharply while the wider Thames Valley area has seen increases. [>>>](#)

Oxfordshire wins prestigious gold award for food sustainability – 31 July 2026

Oxfordshire has been recognised nationally for its work to build a healthier, fairer and more sustainable food system, after becoming one of only seven places in the UK to win the Sustainable Food Places Gold Award. [Good Food Oxfordshire](#) highlighted two areas of exceptional achievement that set Oxfordshire apart: community-centred research through the Oxfordshire Living Lab (FEAST) project and its collaborative, solutions-led approach. [>>>](#)

Local Government Reform (LGR) – 16 July 2026

The UK Government has confirmed the creation of three new unitary councils for Oxfordshire and West Berkshire from 1 April 2028. The new councils will replace the existing county, district and city councils, bringing local services together under three new organisations. You can find out which new council will serve your community and what this means for your area, and view the timeline. Oxfordshire County Council will provide an update at the OCRN meeting at the end of September. [>>>](#)

UK healthy life expectancy falls by two years in past decade – 27 April 2026

BBC news reports that number of years people in the UK spend in good health is falling. Over the past decade, healthy life expectancy (HLE) has dropped by around two years to just under 61 for both men and women. The UK is one of only five of the richest 21 countries to see HLE decline and its fall was the second steepest. The Health Foundation, which produced the analysis, said there was a significant economic cost to this trend and the findings should act as a watershed moment. [>>>](#)

Taking salsa classes can improve mental health, Oxford study suggests – 17 July 2026

Published in *Psychological Medicine*, a randomised controlled trial suggests that taking salsa classes can reduce depression and anxiety. Researchers at the University of Oxford and the Oxford Health NHS trust studied 121 young adults with mild to moderate depression and anxiety. The study found those who took part in salsa showed a clinically significant greater reduction in depressive symptoms and social anxiety than the control group, as well as larger increases in happiness. [>>>](#)



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Produced by the Research Team, Oxfordshire County Council for the Oxfordshire Community Research Network (OCRN).

To join the OCRN and subscribe to the newsletter, or to unsubscribe, please email: researchteam@oxfordshire.gov.uk

The OCRN brings together community organizations, residents, academics, local councils and funders to strengthen community-led and community-engaged research across Oxfordshire.

Why join the OCRN? Because your experience and questions matter, and you don't have to do research alone. OCRN helps members connect, learn and influence how research is shaped, funded and used to support community health, wellbeing and reduce inequalities.