

Growth Hub Newsletter

August 2026

Support for your business

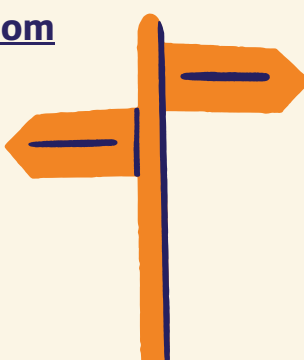
We provide fully funded support for every stage of business, from start-up to growth. This includes one to one support with one of our expert advisors, facilitated workshops and webinars, peer groups and much more.

Get started...

Complete the Enterprise Oxfordshire Business Support Tool today, to get started and receive your business support plan signposting you to profit boosting, market growing business support:

[Business Support Tool](#)

If you have any questions or requests for support please email us directly at: **business@enterpriseoxfordshire.com**



Final chance to nominate!

Celebrate Oxfordshire's business success at MAC26

There is still time to recognise and celebrate the outstanding businesses, leaders and entrepreneurs helping to shape Oxfordshire's thriving business community, with nominations open for the Enterprise Oxfordshire Business Marketplace and Celebration event (MAC26).

The deadline is Monday 10 August, giving businesses and individuals one final opportunity to submit their nominations across categories including Business Leader of the Year, Start-Up of the Year and Growth Business of the Year. Winners will be announced at the awards evening on Wednesday 4 November at Oxford Town Hall.

To be nominated for an award or take part in the Marketplace and Celebration Event as an exhibitor, businesses or individuals should have engaged with Enterprise Oxfordshire Business at any point since April 2022.



Award categories include:

- The Tap Social **Socially Responsible Business of the Year**
- The Stephen Spencer + Associates **Innovation in Customer Experience of the Year**
- The Cypher **Start-up of the Year**
- The Institute of Directors **Business Leader of the Year**
- The Velocity Cycle Couriers **Environmentally Sustainable Business of the Year**
- The Olamalu **Growth Business of the Year**

The Overall Winner Award will also be selected by our Headline Sponsor, Oxfordshire County Council, from the winners of each category.

The event brings together businesses from across the county, providing an exciting opportunity to showcase products and services through a dedicated marketplace before celebrating the achievements of Oxfordshire's business community during the awards ceremony.

Last year's celebration, also held at Oxford Town Hall, welcomed around 200 attendees representing a wide range of sectors from across the county.



MAC26 forms part of Enterprise Oxfordshire Business' ongoing commitment to supporting local businesses at every stage, from starting out and scaling up to taking on new opportunities and challenges.

All award categories are completely free to enter, making this a valuable opportunity to shine a spotlight on the people and businesses making a difference across Oxfordshire.

Don't miss your final chance to nominate before the deadline on Monday 10 August.

[More Info](#)

‘Personal Leadership: Expanding Possibilities’

Join us at a retreat like no other

90% of UK SMEs reported business growth in 2024, with an average growth rate of 27% – largely attributed to the leadership quality of SMEs (The State of Small Business Britain Report 2024).

However, in 2024, only just over a quarter of UK employees rated their manager as highly effective, (Chartered Management Institute), with a headline in The Guardian from the year before proclaiming that bad management has ‘caused 1 in 3 workers to quit’.

In Series 4 of our podcast, OxTalks, we spoke to Leadership Coach Claire Croft, founder of Claire Croft Associates, about [‘What Makes a Good Modern Business Leader?’](#).

During the episode, Claire discusses why transparency, clarity and a willingness to develop people’s potential are essential management qualities, and why poor leadership continues to drive employees away from organisations. She also shares her own experiences and practical insights on how leaders can navigate constant change, foster autonomy without abandonment, and build resilience through thinking before acting.

When growing your business, operational turbulence, working to scale, decision-making and employee burn-out, particularly in smaller businesses, can often mean your ability to lead takes a real hit.

With economic uncertainties, geopolitical disruptions, AI adaption and talent shortages all factors in SME leadership efficacy, it is vital leaders have the opportunity to take a step back and review their leadership strategy.

Leaders must think differently and focus on the leadership issues that shape growth. We’ve launched ‘Personal Leadership: Expanding Possibilities’ – a 2-day, 1-night residential retreat for Oxfordshire SME owners and senior leaders with 5 or more staff – for this exact reason.

With a strong human leadership focus, it is built around real challenges, honest conversations and creating traction, not just another set of leadership tips.

The difference with this business retreat? Our business support is fully-funded – delegates only pay a fee of £268 for this support package to cover accommodation and catering.

Across the two days you will:

- Step out of the day-to-day noise and reconnect with what really matters in your leadership
- Explore core themes such as decision-making, pressure, people and priorities
- Work with practical tools and experiential exercises to increase your self-awareness and leadership range
- Take part in small-group “mastermind” conversations focused on your most pressing real-world challenges
- Connect with a trusted group of peers who understand the realities of leading a growing SME

What the retreat includes:

- A pre-retreat online gathering to meet the cohort, break the ice and name your current leadership challenges
- A two-day, one-night residential retreat at Sudbury House Hotel, with structured sessions, experiential activities and time to think
- Post-retreat peer follow-up to keep the momentum alive and support you in acting on your insights

Participants will leave with:

- Clear, personalised next steps and designed accountability with a scheduled peer follow up after the retreat
- New perspectives on their most pressing leadership issues
- A trusted network of peers to call on for support
- A shared language around leadership to take back into their business
- Renewed energy, more grounded confidence and an expanded sense of what is possible

This retreat is designed for:

- Owners and senior leaders of Oxfordshire-based SMEs with at least 5 staff
- Leaders navigating growth, complexity or transition who want space to think
- People who value honest, human conversations about leadership more than buzzwords or quick fixes

The Personal Leadership: Expanding Possibilities experience will be delivered by Duncan Skelton, an award winning leadership coach who works with senior leaders and founders committed to stretching what’s possible in their organisations.

**Find out more about the
Retreat**

Made Smarter support helps Banbury manufacturer plan for future growth

Made Smarter South East provides expert advice and support to manufacturing businesses, makers and creators, helping them adopt digital and automated technologies to improve productivity, reduce downtime and boost competitiveness.

Brick Kiln Composites, based in Banbury, Oxfordshire, manufactures precision composite components for a range of industries. Through Made Smarter South East, the business completed a Digital Transformation Workshop and joined the Leadership Programme to explore how digital technologies can strengthen its manufacturing processes and support long-term growth.

Josh Tee, HR and Operations Manager, said: "Working with Made Smarter has helped us step back and assess where digital technology can make the biggest difference to our operations. The programme has helped us better understand our current processes, identify pain points and explore how digital tools could improve efficiency, strengthen lean manufacturing and support more sustainable practices.



"For SMEs like ours, it is a fantastic initiative that helps build awareness and confidence around digital opportunities. As we look ahead, technologies will increasingly support every stage of the manufacturing process, from procurement through to quality assurance, helping us create positive change for both our team and our customers."

Following a successful pilot year, the programme has now secured additional funding to continue delivery until 31 March 2027. Backed by £3.1 million, it offers match funding of up to £20,000, alongside specialist advice, leadership training and student placements, helping small and medium-sized businesses, and the people within them, maintain their competitive edge while strengthening the South East economy.

[**Find Out More**](#)

Enterprise Oxfordshire Business Directory

Our fast-growing Business Directory is the perfect place for you to showcase your business, connect with other local enterprises, and take advantage of the numerous opportunities that our network offers. Whether you're a small startup or an established company, listing your business in our directory can significantly enhance your visibility and reach.

The process is simple and straightforward, and our team is here to assist you every step of the way.

[List your business](#)

Oxfordshire Network Groups

Are you looking to make valuable connections and boost your business success? We have some exciting news for you! There are numerous networking groups and events happening right here in Oxfordshire that can help you expand your professional network and open new doors for your business.

The Oxfordshire Network Groups directory is a great resource for discovering the best ways to find networking groups and events near you. Whether you're looking to connect with like-minded professionals, share ideas, or simply grow your business, this is the perfect place to start.

[Find out more](#)

Other Resources Available to Businesses

As part of Enterprise Oxfordshire's unwavering commitment to deliver the best possible service to Oxfordshire's SMEs, we continuously strive to ensure that other services and grant opportunities available to businesses within Oxfordshire are highlighted and signposted on our 'External Resources' website page.

Check out our 'External Resources' page and keep updated with any new opportunities that could benefit your business.

[View resources](#)

Enterprise Oxfordshire Business Events

Find out more about upcoming Enterprise Oxfordshire Business events, workshops and webinars designed to help your business.



OxBOoSt – August

Tuesday 4th August • 4.00pm - 5.00pm • Online

The 'Oxfordshire Business Opportunities & Support network' for all Enterprise Oxfordshire Business clients & anyone who wants to learn more.

The Number 1 regular meet-up for Oxfordshire businesses who want to connect, collaborate and exchange ideas.

Enterprise Oxfordshire Business engages with thousands of business owners and leaders every year providing knowledge, advice and other business development support. But until now there hasn't been an easy way to help these businesses to network. Problem solved...

The OxBOoSt network will meet via zoom on Tuesday 4th August from 4:00pm to 5:00pm and is open to all Oxfordshire based businesses to join (and its free!).

[Register Here](#)

Enterprise Oxfordshire Skills

For more information on Enterprise Oxfordshire Skills please visit:
enterpriseoxfordshireskills.com

New report showcases impact of major county-wide support programme following this year's Employability Day

With Employability Day 2026 taking place in June, Enterprise Oxfordshire Skills is celebrating the achievements of its Social Contract Programme, including 608 apprenticeship starts and £6.1m apprenticeship levy pledges received.

Enterprise Oxfordshire are pleased to announce a new report, which showcases the achievements of the Social Contract Programme, which was introduced back in 2022 to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, by mitigating health and wellbeing challenges related to unemployment and barriers to employment, education, and training in the county.

Announced following this year's national 'Employability Day' on 30 June – a national day of celebration to showcase the impact of employment support and skills provision across the UK – the Social Contract Programme Impact Report 2022-2026 highlights how a significant number of apprenticeships, community employment plans, and job starts from those struggling to find employment have been facilitated through the programme.

Led by Enterprise Oxfordshire Skills, initiatives within the programme included the Apprenticeship Levy Support Scheme, which saw apprenticeship levy-paying businesses within the county (those with an annual pay bill of over £3m) pledge their unused funds to other organisations looking to take on an apprentice.



Results of the initiative – as laid out by the Social Contract Impact Report 2022-2026 – have seen £6.1m levy funds pledged and 435 new apprenticeship starts. Apprenticeship support for employers, including optimising levy funds, is still available through Enterprise Oxfordshire Skills.

Another initiative supported by the Social Contract Programme was the 'No Limits' Programme, which offered inclusive recruitment support for Oxfordshire residents aged 16 and over and provided travel bursaries, bespoke people-centred support and access to electronic devices and data.

'No Limits' made a remarkable impact across Oxfordshire, supporting over 1000 individuals, helping 226 people secure employment, with 518 individuals becoming work-ready or making significant progress towards the labour market.



Enterprise Oxfordshire continues to support individuals towards employment, with current Skills Bootcamps and Connect to Work programmes supporting those with specific challenges in entering the labour market.

[Find out more about our current programmes](#)

Enterprise Oxfordshire Skills

For more information on Enterprise Oxfordshire Skills please visit:
enterpriseoxfordshireskills.com

Oxfordshire Careers Hub Annual Event 2026 brings together schools and employers to support young people

This year's Oxfordshire Careers Hub Annual Event provided a valuable opportunity for school and college careers leaders, employers, educators and partners to come together with a shared purpose: improving outcomes for young people across Oxfordshire.

Held at Oxford North on 1 July, the event focused on the theme 'Bridging the gap: Supporting priority students through careers education', highlighting practical approaches to ensuring every young person can access meaningful careers guidance and opportunities. The event also featured a collaborative afternoon workshop bringing together employers and schools/colleges to co-design meaningful, inclusive workplace experiences for young people.

Employers highlighted the benefits of strengthening links with education. Addisen Gregory, Future Talent Lead at Grundon Waste Management, said: "As an employer, connections with schools are vital to help with our future talent pipelines. So these events are a fantastic opportunity to network as well as share ideas that can support the schools as well as the students and us as businesses."



Stacey Lynch, Early Careers, Talent & Outreach Lead at Tokamak Energy said: "It is always great to collaborate with education and industry partners who share a commitment to preparing learners for the world of work. At Tokamak Energy, we're proud to be a Cornerstone Employer, supporting the development of future talent and strengthening links between education and industry."

Key outcomes from the event included increased confidence among careers leaders in implementing the updated careers guidance, stronger connections between schools, colleges and employers, and a renewed focus on supporting priority and disadvantaged students through meaningful careers education.



Attendees left with practical strategies, new partnerships and a clearer understanding of how collaborative careers programmes, workplace experiences and employer engagement can help young people develop the skills, knowledge and aspirations needed to thrive in Oxfordshire's future workforce.

If you are interested in supporting the work of Oxfordshire Careers Hub, please get in touch at skills@enterpriseoxfordshire.com.

Oxfordshire Net Zero Business Support

SMEs across Oxfordshire play a vital role in helping the county reach net zero emissions by 2050. To make this journey easier, Enterprise Oxfordshire have created a one stop resource hub offering guidance, tools and funding opportunities – no matter your sector or where you are on your sustainability journey.

We believe that with the right support and resources, every business can make a meaningful contribution to a greener future. Let's work together to achieve net zero and make Oxfordshire a leader in sustainability.

[**Find Out More**](#)

Other Net Zero Support

Climate Action Oxfordshire

Find out what sustainability support for Oxfordshire SMEs is available, including free energy assessments, match funding for upgrades, practical checklists, local and national resources, and grant schemes to cut costs and emissions.

[**Find Out More**](#)

Low Carbon Hub

Low Carbon Hub work with businesses and organisations across Oxfordshire on their energy efficiency, helping them to save money on their energy bills as well as generate clean energy.

[**Find Out More**](#)

Business Climate Hub

The UK Business Climate Hub provides sustainability advice for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The Hub is a shared endeavour, developed with the [Department for Energy Security and Net Zero \(DESNZ\)](#), the [SME Climate Hub](#) and business organisations, energy networks, high street banks and professional bodies. Alongside a range of free tools and resources, the SME Climate Hub hosts the SME Climate Commitment.

[**Find Out More**](#)

Do you know an Oxfordshire climate hero?

The Oxford Climate Awards are back for 2026 – and nominations are now open!

The awards, run in partnership with the Oxford Mail, celebrate the people, businesses, schools and community groups helping to create a greener, more sustainable Oxfordshire. Last year's winners included a food redistribution charity supporting thousands of people every week, and a travel buddy scheme helping adults with learning disabilities travel independently.

Whether it's a resident making their home more energy efficient, a school inspiring young people, a community group protecting nature, or a business reducing its environmental impact, we want to hear their story.

Nominations are free and open until 9 August. If you know someone making a difference, nominate them today!

[Find Out More](#)

Cherwell District Council – Sustainable Practices

The latest greenhouse gas reports show that almost 25% of the Cherwell District's CO₂^e emissions come from commerce and industry. To address this, CDC are considering conducting short knowledge-gathering workshops with local business owners. By understanding what prevents individuals or organisations from becoming greener, CDC can address challenges such as financial constraints, lack of information, or practical difficulties. This knowledge will enable the council to provide more tailored support through grants, educational resources, or policy changes.

[Find Out More](#)

Oxfordshire Business Support

Thrive at Work Oxfordshire

A free support programme developed to assist Oxfordshire-based workplaces passionate about creating happy, healthy, and inclusive environments where organisations and employees can thrive. Any Oxfordshire-based workplace with three or more employees is eligible to access the programme.

[Find Out More](#)

West Oxfordshire Achieve Customer Excellence (ACE) Programme now open: Transform Your Customer Experience and Grow Your Business

The fully funded West Oxfordshire Achieve Customer Excellence (ACE) Programme is now open to local small and micro businesses. ACE helps you understand your customer journey, improve service, and boost loyalty and spend. Through professional mystery shopping, you'll see your business exactly as customers do, with clear insight into strengths and areas for improvement. You'll also receive practical reports, free customer-experience training, one-to-one mentoring, and a follow-up audit to track progress. All participants are entered into the West Oxfordshire Service Excellence Awards. Spaces are limited—open to retail, hospitality, professional services and independent traders.

[Find Out More](#)

Innovate UK funding for the Creative Industries

Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), will invest up to £10 million in successful applicants in this competition. The aim of this competition is to support early stage innovation in the intersection of high growth potential Createch and the Industrial Strategy Frontier industries. This funding is to develop innovations beyond proof of concept, de-risking future investment and supporting long term sector growth.
Deadline: 11th August 2026.

[Find Out More](#)

Business Growth Service

The Business Growth Service is accessible via a new digital platform which acts as a single-entry point for tailored support.

Whether you're looking for funding, mentoring, or export advice, the platform helps you find what you need quickly and easily.

Enterprise Oxfordshire Business is integrating the Business Growth Service into our communications and promotional activities, making it easier for local businesses to discover and access support. This builds on our existing offer, which has already delivered significant impact.

[Learn More](#)

Defence Office for Small Business Growth (DOSBG)

The Defence Office for Small Business Growth is the Ministry of Defence's focal point for improving how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) access, compete for, and grow within the UK defence supply chain.

[Learn More](#)

MADE SMARTER

Nearly 300 South East manufacturers have already benefited from the Made Smarter South East programme last year. Manufacturers and makers - don't miss out!

Made Smarter is a government-funded push to drive growth in South East manufacturing SMEs, helping boost productivity and increase their competitive edge through the adoption of new industrial technologies. After last year's successes, the programme has been extended for a further year to March 31st 2027.

Once you've registered for the Made Smarter programme, you will be assigned a Technical Expert who will provide personalised advice and support to your manufacturing business. They will help you adopt advanced and automated technologies. Made Smarter also provides up to £20k in grant funding, covering up to 50%, along with specialist advice, leadership and workforce champion training, and paid internships.

Whatever you make, make it smarter.

[**Find Out More**](#)



Business & IP Centre Oxfordshire

At the Oxford Westgate Library

Supporting Oxfordshire residents to start, protect and grow their own business.

[Learn More](#)



Small Business
Commissioner

The Office of the Small Business Commissioner (OSBC)

The Office of the Small Business Commissioner (OSBC) is an independent public body established by Government under the Enterprise Act 2016 to tackle overdue payments and unfavourable payment practices in the private sector.

[Learn More](#)



OSEP

OSEP provides support, empowerment, and advocacy for local social enterprises, enterprising charities, and purposeful businesses in Oxfordshire.

Email: hello@osep.org.uk

[Learn More](#)

District Council Support for Businesses

[Cherwell District Council](#)

[Oxford City Council](#)

[South Oxfordshire District Council](#)

[Vale of White Horse District Council](#)

[West Oxfordshire District Council](#)

Non Business News/Events:

Breakthrough eight-week Accelerator Programme

Breakthrough is an eight-week accelerator designed for disabled entrepreneurs who are ready to take the next step in growing their businesses. Built to remove systemic barriers and amplify the strengths founders already hold, the programme offers expert-led support, tailored funding advice, and a powerful community of peers with lived experience. The programme culminates in a Showcase Day, where participants will have the opportunity to pitch to investors and funders, as well as access a £21,000 grant funding pot. Deadline: 19th August 2026.

[Learn More](#)

The Grocers' Charity Grants Scheme

The fund offers grants of up to £5,000 to smaller UK registered charities supporting vulnerable or disadvantaged people. Funding can support a wide range of community-based work including mental health, poverty, homelessness, disability support, youth services, inclusion projects and wellbeing initiatives.

The scheme is particularly suitable for smaller grassroots charities with an annual turnover under £500,000. Deadline 15th August

[Learn More](#)

South Oxfordshire District Council Community Grants

The council provide grants to voluntary and community organisations to help build thriving communities and improve the quality of life for the residents of South Oxfordshire, through projects that create thriving, healthy and inclusive communities, provides infrastructure that meets local need, and that take action on climate change and nature recovery. Grants currently open include Performing Arts Grant Fund and Fund for nature recovery projects.

[Learn More](#)

The Oxford Magazine: What's on in Oxfordshire

[Learn More](#)

Oxfordshire County Council News

[Learn More](#)

Experience Oxfordshire: What's on

[Learn More](#)

If you have anything you would like sharing in future editions, please
email: business@enterpriseoxfordshire.com