

PARISH REPORT JULY 2016

MY LEADER'S STATEMENT ON EU REFERENDUM RESULT

"Following David Cameron honouring his pledge to offer a referendum on our membership of the European Union, the British people have voted to take more direct control of the decisions which affect them. That process must not stop at the gates of Parliament. This is an opportunity to remake our democratic system, and must be used to drive, not delay, the process of devolving power from Westminster and Whitehall to England's cities and counties, and from those cities and counties to the towns, villages, and neighbourhoods within them. The priorities of the county council will remain the same – to support economic growth, to protect the most vulnerable, and to drive efficiency in public services. To support these priorities, our work on stripping out another level of bureaucratic decision making by developing proposals for a new council for the whole of Oxfordshire will continue, as will our ambition to win a wide-ranging devolution deal from central government."

FINANCIAL OUTURN 2015/16

Oxfordshire County Council restricted overspends for the 2015/16 financial year to just one-fifth of one per cent of its budget (0.2 per cent) despite being in the process of saving £361m from 2010 to 2020.

Councillor Lawrie Stratford, the Council's Cabinet member for Finance, said: "Despite exceptionally difficult circumstance, the council has delivered a very small overspend of 0.2 per cent of the overall budget. In the face of serious adversity our staff have demonstrated real expertise working in hand in hand with council departments.

"There is a culture of strong financial management at Oxfordshire County. This shines through despite the size and complexity of the organisation and significant reductions in funding at the same time as increasing demand.

The council has had a recruitment freeze and freeze on non-urgent expenditure and this also helped deliver this outcome. Between 2010 and March 2016, the council saved £247m. From 2016 to 2020 it has £114m still to save.

PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY COUNCIL

As previously reported, Oxfordshire's District Councils have appointed consultants PwC to prepare a report on the future of local government in Oxfordshire, and OCC has appointed consultants Grant Thornton to do the same. Ten workshops were held by OCC over the course of June to obtain input from parish councils about concerns they might have and opportunities they might relish with a change to Unitary local government. PwC were due to report for the Districts by the end of June, but are behind schedule. The Grant Thornton report for the County is still on schedule for July. All councils will then submit proposals to central government in the autumn, following a period of public consultation.

INCREASING ADULT AND CHILD SOCIAL CARE COSTS

Adult and child social care costs continue to increase as a proportion of OCC's expenditure, now accounting for nearly half the council's budget. OCC's obligation to assist with unaccompanied young asylum seekers has added further added pressure. These are young people under the age of 18 who arrive in the county without any family. Often they have sneaked onto the back of a lorry and when it stops at a service station jump off. The local authority where they present themselves has a duty of care to the child; we are working with central government to find a solution to this matter.

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COUNCIL AMONG NATION'S BEST FOR CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Only a quarter of councils – including Oxfordshire – have passed Ofsted's new harder inspection test for children's social services, according to the watchdog's annual report. The remaining three-quarters were found to be 'inadequate' or 'requiring improvement'. [The report](#) ranks Oxfordshire among the best performing of 87 councils so far put to the test, with 64 of these failing to secure a 'good' rating. Oxfordshire is also one of just three areas where Ofsted and its partner inspectorates have completed the new Joint Target Area Inspection, which highly praised the council's work to tackle child sexual exploitation alongside its partner agencies.

GRASS VERGE CUTTING PROGRAMME 2016

Financial pressures have forced OCC to reduce its overall verge mowing in recent years; just one general cut a year is now carried out across the whole of the road network. This includes cutting all visibility splays at junctions and cutting grass verges to a distance 1m back from the kerb. The general cut started on 20 June, although visibility splay issues have been dealt with earlier if they have been reported or observed by highway inspectors. More information can be found at: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/grass-verge-cutting-programme-2016>

COUNCIL CONTEMPLATES IDEA OF NEW PARK AND RIDES

A study which could lead to up to five new park and ride sites being built to serve Oxfordshire has been published. OCC, through the Oxford Transport Strategy (OTS), part of Local Transport Plan 4, is proactively working to find solutions to the demands that are increasingly being placed on the road network by current and projected growth. In order to reduce congestion within the city and on the approaches to it, the OTS proposes a major expansion and reconfiguration of the Park & Ride system to intercept more car trips earlier in their journeys and further away from the city. In addition to new park and ride sites, the OTS proposes a network of "Rapid Transit" public transport routes to provide an uplift to transport connectivity in the city, including links between the proposed new sites and the city's "Eastern Arc" (broadly speaking the Headington/Cowley area). The report is the latest step in the process of delivering solutions. The park and ride study has reviewed the locations proposed as part of the OTS, and made specific recommendations on where new park and ride sites should be located, following an assessment of the corridors. New sites are proposed at Eynsham, Cumnor, Lodge Hill, Sandford, and Oxford Airport, phased over the next 15 years.

MULTI-MILLION POUND BOOST FUELS EXPANSION OF HIGH-SPEED BROADBAND

The second phase of Better Broadband for Oxfordshire is now underway after the first part was completed on time and under budget. The first phase of the broadband programme exceeded many of its targets and, as a result, the county is expecting up to £6.75 million of funds to be made available to extend the fibre network to even more remote communities. Since the roll-out began more than two years ago, Better Broadband for Oxfordshire has made faster fibre broadband available to more than 70,000 county premises – 64,500 of which have access to superfast broadband speeds of 24 megabits per second (Mbps) and above.

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