

County councillor update report Andy Graham Feb/Mar 2023

Budget: The Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance 2023-2024 budget was passed at full council. The budget sees above inflation investment in children's services, and significant increases for adult social care and highways. The Conservatives presented a vision for a council stripped back to statutory obligations only. To achieve a rise in council tax 1% lower than the administration proposed, the alternative Conservative budget proposed cuts to libraries, the fire and rescue service, buses, funding to parish councils for 20mph schemes, a 25% cut to the councillor priority fund, and ending the joint parking and bus ticket for park and rides. Officers reported to council that the Conservative proposal, 2

which also included increased borrowing from reserves to fund free parking at 2 Oxford P&Rs, would have weakened the council's financial position.

5-year network management (highways) plan: A 5-year plan was agreed at cabinet on how the highways network is used. The document (among other things),

- Aligns highways policy with new transport and environment policies
- Sets out the rules for work on the highways and increased fees and fines for e.g., broadband utilities
- Prioritizes ensuring walking, cycling and bus travel is possible during road works
- Aims to reduce inappropriate use of local roads by freight

Bid for more active travel money: OCC has submitted new bids for funding to the Department for Transport (tranche 4), following on from successful previous bids. Schemes proposed include improvements in Abingdon, Bicester, Witney and Oxford. Money will also be spent county-wide to improve cycle parking and wayfinding routes.

Verges: A new verges and vegetation policy was adopted at cabinet to improve the management of roadside nature reserves and support for areas of local community managed biodiversity. The policy also instructs that footpaths and cycle paths are kept accessible and not restricted by grass and vegetation growth, and that visibility is maintained at junctions and other high-risk areas.

New Chief Exec: OCC's new chief executive, Martin Reeves has now started at OCC

*****GRANTS AND COST OF LIVING*****

Cost of living support: Residents receiving housing benefit, but not in receipt of other state benefits, can claim £300 to help with living costs, thanks to the latest round of the Household Support Fund. Oxfordshire County Council has sent letters to residents eligible for support. Claims need to be made by 28 March 2023

Grants for care workers: Cost of living grants are available for care workers, available from the Care Workers' hardship grant – funded by Oxfordshire County Council. Up to £2000 can be applied for. The process is light touch and can be paid within two weeks.

Home to School Transport Policy Review Report

The review has now been completed and will be discussed with recommendations at the Peoples Overview Committee at County Hall on Thursday 30th March. The recommendations will then go to Cabinet for determination.

Councillors Priority Fund

Community groups, parish and town councils can make requests to their local councillor from April for support to projects that have community benefit. Contact me directly by email to discuss or via Oxfordshire County Council's website for further details.