**REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS NOVEMBER 2015**

FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE

**BUDGET CONSULTATION**

OCC has launched a public consultation on options for saving money. It has already saved or has firm plans to save nearly £300m since 2010 but believes it needs to find another £50m of savings over the next four years. The government is reducing public spending to tackle the national budget deficit, which means we have to make yet more difficult decisions about council services.

As well as receiving less money from government, the council faces rising demand for services – particularly for vulnerable adults and children at risk of abuse and neglect. About half OCC's budget is spent on 2% of the population of Oxfordshire, and that proportion is set to rise to as a result of a growing aging population. The council is consulting the public before taking the decisions and delivering a balanced budget on 16th February 2016. *Talking Oxfordshire*, the council’s budget consultation, started on 20 October, when all the savings options were published on the council’s website. It will close on 30 November.

There are three public events with an independent chair alongside the leader and chief finance officer to provide residents with a chance to find out about the council’s budget position and have their say. The first was on 27th October in Oxford, and the second at Banbury Town Hall on 2nd November, and the last at Regal Centre, Wallingford on 5th November. Start time 7.00pm. People need to register in advance to attend the event. To register or take part in the consultation online go to **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/budget**. Hard copies of the budget consultation documents will also be available in every library.

**CHILDREN’S CENTRE AND EARLY INTERVENTION CHANGES**

OCC is also asking for views on its proposal to adopt a new model of children's services in Oxfordshire for children aged 0-19 to save £8 million from the budget by 2016-17. The proposal is to create a brand new service for families and their children aged 0-19 years old, or up to 25 if the child has additional needs. The consultation runs until 23:59 on 10 January 2016.

OCC would open up to eight new Children and Family Centres across Oxfordshire. These centres would support children and their families who need help and will integrate the work of the Children's Centres, the Early Intervention Hubs and Children's Social Care. As well as the new Children and Family Centres OCC would also provide an outreach service so children and families can be supported close to where they live. Furthermore, OCC would work with schools, health and other services to ensure that children and families get the help that they need.

As part of the consultation process OCC would like to identify any potential impact of this proposal. OCC would also like to identify options for the future use of the Children's Centres and Early Intervention Hub buildings. Options about how universal services could continue to be run without financial support from OCC are also to be considered. Hard copies of the consultation are available at all children’s centres and early intervention hubs. There will also be three open meetings to discuss the proposals. The events are 6-7.30pm and dates are:

* 18 November - Kings Centre, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES
* 23 November - Didcot Civic Centre, Britwell Road, Didcot, OX11 7JN
* 30 November - John Paul II Centre, Causeway, Bicester OX26 6AW

**OXFORDSHIRE TOGETHER – SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH EVENT FOR PARISH COUNCILS**

As referred to above, OCC is looking at alternative ways in which it can deliver a number of different public services, across a wide range of areas. The way public services are delivered will shift towards enabling people and communities to take ownership of local priorities. OCC will continue to provide community leadership and foster partnership working, but the days when the council could deliver all services to all people have gone. OCC has started talking to town and parish councils to identify opportunities to work together. An initial engagement event for town and parish councils took place on 21st September. OCC's vision for working together is outlined in *Oxfordshire Together – the Model* booklet, with further details on some of the initial services in scope included in the *Transitional Offer of Highway Services* booklet. Both can be found at **www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether**. The programme timetable is:

September – December

* Initial discussion with town and parish councils.
* Engagement with town and parish councils interested in taking on delivery of some services to develop agreements.

January - April 2016

* Implementation of the first ‘tranche’ of agreements

April 2016 onwards

* Review viability of approach and consider further roll out.

**BETTER BROADBAND FOR OXFORDSHIRE – UPDATE**

OCC is on track to achieve the target – agreed back in 2013 – of connecting 64,500 homes and businesses with superfast broadband by the end of 2015. By the end of August OCC had enabled over 56,000 premises to be connected to superfast (24mbps) broadband, and expects to reach the goal of 64,500 premises by the end of the year, on time and within budget.

**FREE WI-FI IN LIBRARIES**

OCC has been awarded more than £86,000 by Arts Council England for Wi-Fi to be installed in the 28 Oxfordshire libraries that currently do not have it (it is already installed in 15 of the county's 43 libraries). The WiFi fund supports the Arts Council’s goals around developing library services, ensuring that they are fit for purpose now and in the future. This is one-off grant. It is not a substitute for money that may be saved from the Library Service’s budgets as part of the council’s 2016-20 budget savings options. Installation will take place during Spring 2016.

**ALL 43 LIBRARIES TO STAY OPEN AND BECOME OCC’S FRONT DOOR**

In addition to the welcome installation of WiFi across the county, the Library Service will now undertake a service restructure merging with Customer Services in order that the public will be able to access a whole range of government services on line, making the libraries the Council’s front door.This restructure will contribute towards the Council’s overall savings target and the £1m out £7m budget that the Libraries must find. Further savings are proposed through the mobile library service being withdrawn but in mitigation the Home Library Service will be increased for people who are isolated and housebound. The Service has been so successful in attracting volunteers to help run the Community Libraries it is hoped that many more friends, relations and neighbours will come forward to help take books to the people they know locally who enjoy a good read and some extra company.