

REPORT FROM YOUR COUNTY COUNCILLOR – LORRAINE LINDSAY- GALE JUNE 2015

COUNTY COUNCIL AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT BUDGETS

In 2010 Oxfordshire County Council received £120 million pa from central government. This sum has reduced to £62 million pa in the current year, further reducing to zero by 2022. Since 2010 the council has saved £204 million, with a further £88 million of savings to be made by 2018. A report to the Cabinet on 24th May stated that there could be another £50 - £60 million of saving to be found. This will be a challenge to the County Council, particularly with the increasing pressure on both adult and children's social care – currently around 50% of the budget is spent on just 2% of the population. The Government Budget on 8th July, along with the spending review later in the autumn, will provide more details about the impact of central government cuts on local government.

SUPPORTED TRANSPORT PROGRAMME INCLUDING BUS SUBSIDIES

A report to Cabinet started the consultation process, to be carried out by the independent Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, for the Supported Transport Programme including bus subsidies. A message must go out to communities concerning local buses: 'use them or lose them.'

DEVOLVED POWERS

There is a government commitment to devolve powers and budgets down to a more local level. OCC welcomes this move and the Leader is working with Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire County Councils to promote 'England's Economic Heartland', which has a similar size to the Greater Manchester area, to ensure that Oxfordshire does not miss out on infrastructure-funding opportunities. This is not about a Super Unitary or a Mayoral system but about areas working together to deliver economic growth. If more powers were to be devolved down to the County Council, it is likely that more powers could be devolved down to large Town Councils to enable decisions to be made locally.

HOW BUSINESSES CAN AVOID WHEELIE BIN BLAZE RISK

Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service has this month called on local businesses to cut the fire risk from wheelie bins. The Service has recently been called out to fires which spread to properties after nearby wheelie bins and rubbish stored next to them were set alight. Stuart Garner, Premises Risk and Protection Manager for Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service, said: "It is important that businesses understand how dangerous it can be to keep wheelie bins too close to buildings. The rubbish in them can often be easily ignited and it can burn very quickly. Flames can rapidly spread to the nearby building, endangering lives, causing damage or in some cases totally destroying property." More details here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/news/2015/jun/how-businesses-can-avoid-wheelie-bin-blaze-risk>

WOODLANDS: OWNERS AND MANAGERS ASKED TO TAKE PART IN SURVEY

Oxfordshire County Council and the Sylva Foundation are working together to identify what support woodland owners need to get the best out of their woodlands in the future. An online survey has been launched to gather views and opinions that will be used to improve existing and develop new support services for woodland owners and managers within the County. Details here:

www.sylva.org.uk/oxwoodsurvey

WORK INTERNSHIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Oxfordshire County Council is launching supported internships for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). It is an exciting venture between local colleges, Oxfordshire Employment Service and Mencap. The project aims to increase the number of education providers offering supported internships, resulting in more young people with complex SEND getting work placements leading to paid employment. It is funded by the Department for Education as part of the budget for colleges and aims at providing real life skills and foster independence in trainees. The pilot scheme, to be implemented in September 2015 involves four colleges: Henley, Banbury & Bicester, City of Oxford and Abingdon & Witney. These will provide the learning support, particularly with English and maths to 20 trainees. The launch events later this month will help strengthen the network, recruit trainees, and get the support from carers and employers. The unpaid internships will last for 12 months and will expose the interns to different roles within a large private company environment with the potential for a permanent job at the end of it or a progression route. These personalised internships differ from traineeships and apprenticeships with extra workplace and learning support. Details here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/news/2015/jun/work-internships-young-people-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities>

FOSTERING AWARENESS PROGRAMME

Oxfordshire residents are being urged to 'have a conversation' about fostering and to consider whether they could change a child's life by becoming a foster carer. A series of public information events hosted by the council's recruitment team is being held as part of Foster Care Fortnight (June 1 to 14) for anyone interested in finding out more.

Foster carers provide a range of placements from emergency and short-term to long-term and specialist placements. The council would like to attract more local foster carers - particularly people willing to care for brothers and sisters, teenagers and children with special needs - to enable them to remain in-county and maintain links with their families. The council offers excellent training, support and allowances to foster carers and would welcome enquiries from potential applicants who can call 0800 7835724.