

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS

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BUDGET

The hard work of preparing a budget for 2016/17 will soon begin in earnest. The exact financial position will not be known until the end of November when the Comprehensive Spending Review is announced; this may mean that the final details of the Budget may not be decided until the January 2016 Cabinet meeting. It is currently expected that around another £60m of savings will have to be made; these will mean some difficult decisions will have to be taken in order to achieve a balanced budget on 16th February 2016. The County Council has already made savings of £204 million since 2010. Further savings of £88 million by 2018 have been planned, so the additional £60m takes the total savings to £352 million. The biggest single budget challenge is the ever-rising cost of Social Care (see below).

THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL CARE COSTS

Nearly half of the Council's budget goes on Social Care. By and large, the Council's responsibilities here are statutory, meaning that for the most part, budget cuts fall in other areas. An extraordinary statistic is that at any one time, just 2% of the population account for all these Social Care costs. The figures are shown in detail on the attached chart.

HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE STRATEGY

A HWRC strategy will aim to create a sustainable network of sites across the county that are well located for areas of population. The network, together with district council kerbside collections, will aim to maximise the amount of waste reused and recycled in the county and minimise the amount of material sent for disposal. An agreed strategy will enable OCC to seek contributions from new development to maintain and improve the HWRC network. In order to achieve a financially sustainable network of sites, it is proposed that the strategy to be consulted on is based on the following key objectives:

- reduce number of sites;
- locate sites to limit as much as possible the drive times for residents;
- locate the sites as close as possible to the more populated centres.

A public consultation started on 10 August and will run until 5 October 2015. It can be found here: <https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/HWRCstrategy/consultationHome>

RECYCLING ROAD SWEEPINGS

Road sweepings from across Oxfordshire are to be processed at a state-of-the-art new treatment and recovery facility in Ewelme – a move which is designed to boost recycling rates and help cut costs for Oxfordshire County Council. The specially-designed facility, built by Grundon Waste Management at a cost of £1.3m, is one of the most technically advanced in the UK and helps councils meet their recycling targets through the recovery of all road sweeping waste, including leaves, sand and grit, and metals. Around 5,000 tonnes of sweepings a year are collected from Oxfordshire's roads by operators working for each of the five district councils; all of this material will now be processed and recycled at the new plant.

REDUCING THE COST OF THE BACK OFFICE

Cabinet agreed to join the Hampshire partnership as an operational partner for the provision of back office support services through their Integrated Business Centre, with an expected saving of £805,000 pa. The existing Hampshire partnership is legally underpinned by an unincorporated public-to-public partnership. This enables each public body to jointly deliver and share the benefits of shared services between themselves. As a partnership rather than a commercial outsourcing, the expectation is that all partners (including OCC) will collaborate and work together for the good of the partnership. OCC will join the partnership through a joint working agreement, retaining influence on the partnership through an operational forum, which provides a basis for consultation and the exercise of influence in the management of the overall joint working arrangements.

A-LEVEL RESULTS

The wait is over for thousands of students receiving their A-Level results at schools and colleges across Oxfordshire. Based on the information provided by schools and academies so far, early indications appear to show around 96 per cent of students have gained two or more A-Levels at the A*- E pass rate. This would represent an increase on the 2014 figure (95.1 per cent) – but confirmed results will be published later in the year. Information received also suggests around 50% of students have achieved two or more A levels at grade A*-B. This would also represent an improvement on the corresponding figure for 2014 (46.7%); however, these are estimates only and should be viewed with caution at this stage.

GCSE RESULTS

Around 6,200 young people across Oxfordshire have now received their GCSE results. It is the second year since the introduction of a number of national changes to the examination and assessment process, including the requirement for schools to submit their 'first results' only for Government assessment, with the results of any retaken exams not taken into account. As was the case last year, the council has received a mix of results from schools and academies, with some reporting their 'best results', and others reporting results based only on 'first exams' taken. As such, the council cannot yet provide an estimate for the percentage of Oxfordshire students achieving the national benchmark of five A*-C grades, including English and Maths. Verified results will be published nationally in the autumn. Last year Oxfordshire moved ahead of the national average for the proportion of students achieving 5A*-Cs including English and Maths. A total of 59.4% of pupils gained five A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths compared with 56.8 per cent for state-funded schools across the country.

A40 STRATEGY

When the A40 strategy was debated at the July Cabinet meeting, it was decided to take a long-term view for the A40 corridor looking at all possible options. During September/October there will be exhibitions and open meetings when residents will be able to discuss and understand all the different options.

CUTTESLOWE AND WOLVERCOTE ROUNDABOUTS

The works at these roundabouts are a necessary part of the A40 strategy and need to be done in one go as the junctions are so close together that any works to one impact on the other. Doing them together also significantly reduces the length of time that drivers will be impacted

upon. The work will take more than a year; it could have been done more quickly, but that would have involved the unacceptable closure of key roads.

CHIPPING NORTON CONSULTATION

If approved at the Cabinet meeting on 15th September, a consultation into the future of intermediate care beds in Chipping Norton will now go ahead, as funding for the current arrangements will only last until the end of March 2016. The consultation will be on alternative arrangements, which are sustainable beyond March 2016.