

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS JULY 2016 FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE

POST REFERENDUM

After the vote by the British people to leave the European Union, 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.

PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY COUNCIL

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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>

PROPOSED THIRD READING BRIDGE OVER THE THAMES

A third 'Summit Meeting' was convened by MPs John Howell and Rob Wilson in June to review progress on the preparation of the *Strategic Outline Business Case* to secure funding to move the proposal forward. In addition to the MPs, the meeting was attended by various Berkshire councils and enterprise groups. OCC was represented by Cabinet Member David Nimmo Smith and the councillor for the most affected Division, David Bartholomew. The scheme supporters want to take 55,000 cars a day out of the centre of Reading. OCC is participating in the process to ensure any solution doesn't simply move Reading's traffic problems into south Oxfordshire.

PERSONAL

I have taken on another area of Cabinet responsibility. In addition to Cultural Services – Libraries, Museum and History Services and the Music Service, I have taken over responsibility for the County Council's property portfolio. I see this as an exciting challenge because the County Council is about to undertake a significant programme of asset rationalisation. I have felt for a long time that such a programme was long overdue, and am looking forward to slimming down the County's footprint through a combination of service colocation, relocation and asset disposal. In addition our libraries will be developed into community hubs, providing a safe public space where individuals can access appropriate central and local government services online, and where residents can come together to run all kinds of community activities. We are currently looking to see if some of the Children's Centres could be located in their local library to reduce costs. In some areas of the country this works very successfully.