**REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS FEBRUARY 2018**

**FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE**

**COUNCILLOR PRIORITY FUND KEY PART OF BUDGET PROPOSALS**

Oxfordshire County Council is going to reinstate the popular Councillor’s Stewardship Fund that was axed during the cuts re-naming it the Councillor Priority Fund. County Councillors will have a £15k fund to support parish council highways and community group projects. In addition, OCC will prioritise children’s social care with £1.9m extra being put in to this service. Overall this means £8.5m is being added to the budget for children’s social care in 2018/19. This follows the central government announcement that it would allow councils to raise council tax by an additional 1% primarily to address financial pressures in children’s social care. The council had proposed a 1.99% Council Tax, with an additional 3% precept for adult social care bringing the total proposed rise to 4.99% the same as last year. The additional 1% that has now been allowed would take the total rise for 2018/19 to 5.99%, with a proposed 2.99 % rise in 2019/20. Other calls on funding include the local government national pay settlement where a total of £2.9m extra is required over 2018/19 (£1.4m) and 2019/20 (£1.5m) The Budget proposals go to Full Council on February 13th.

**GROWTH DEAL CLOSE TO AGREEMENT**

As detailed in the December report, the Oxfordshire Growth Board\* has reached an outline Housing and Growth Agreement (Growth Deal) with Government. This will see an additional £215m of investment over the next five years to build infrastructure, support the delivery of new homes and boost economic productivity across the county. This breaks down as: £30m pa for five years for infrastructure; £60m for affordable homes across the county; and £5m to develop a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP). The Board wants the five-year deal to be the first stage in a sustained partnership with Government to secure the ongoing investment needed to deliver properly planned growth and economic development over the coming years. This will support councils to achieve the ambition of 100,000 new homes across the county over the period 2011-2031, as identified through the 2014 countywide Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Local Plans. During the period of development all planning authorities will have their five-year land supply requirement reduced to a three-year land supply with that condition in place for the first three years of the new JSSP. The Growth Deal is coming to the stage that it will soon go through the six councils’ democratic processes to be agreed.

\*The Oxfordshire Growth Board comprises the six councils: Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council, together with the county’s Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP).

**CARILLION: OCC AGREES EXIT DEAL AFTER COMPANY COLLAPSE**

OCC has formally terminated its contract with Carillion LGS Limited effective from 1 February 2018, following the collapse of the parent company. This brings forward the already agreed end of the contract negotiated last June set for the end of June 2018. OCC made a net payment of £10.65m to Carillion to cover work already completed as part of the final settlement to end the contract. Carillion provided school meals and cleaning; maintenance of council buildings; property services, and construction work such as school extensions. Services previously provided by Carillion will continue through a mix of bringing staff in-house; continuing with suppliers, and working with sub-contractors. Like every other Carillion customer, OCC is now working out the most cost-effective way to complete work left unfinished by Carillion. It has taken over direct responsibility for commissioning future construction work and service delivery.

**NEW FUNDING BOOSTS SUPPORT FOR ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN**

Extra funding to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASCs) living in Oxfordshire has been received by the county council. A government grant worth £335,000 has been awarded to help strengthen the support services available to UASCs over the next two years. It is part of a wider [national funding announcement of £29million](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/29-million-extra-to-boost-councils-support-for-vulnerable-children). OCC has the same responsibilities for looking after UASCs arriving in the county as it does for all other children and young people in care. Young asylum-seekers are among the most vulnerable groups in society – often with no connections or family in the UK, little spoken English and having made long and traumatic journeys. The new money is not for covering the cost of care placements themselves, but for additional support to help UASCs adjust to living in the county, and integrate with local communities. The council currently looks after 52 UASCs. These young people have predominantly travelled from Afghanistan, Albania and Eritrea.

**LOCALITIES GRANTS AWARDED TO NEWINGTON AND BERINSFIELD**

I was delighted to be able to sponsor two successful grant applications to the OCC Localities Grants scheme. Newington Parish Council applied for £1,800 to pay for a feasibility study into refurbishing their Church so that the building can function as a community hub along the lines of Stadhampton. The Employment Action Group applied for £3,895 to enhance their universal services for young families run from the Berin Centre in Berinsfield.

**OXFORD TO CAMBRIDGE EXPRESSWAY**

On 12th December an overwhelming majority of County Councillors (57 out of 63) voted to support a motion tabled by Cllr Atkins calling on the Leader Ian Hudspeth to write to Highways England, NIC, the Minister Chris Grayling etc asking on behalf of the County Council for an Independent Inquiry before any decision is taken on the preferred corridor for the Expressway. (Two of the possible Southern routes cut straight across this Division.) Up until now the proposed timetable for the project only includes an Inquiry afterwards, when the choice between North/West, Central or South of Oxford has been taken. It was encouraging to get such widespread support from right across the county.

A cross party Cabinet Advisory Group has been set up at OCC to monitor and comment on the progress of the project. And I recently attended a meeting with MP’s John Howell and Ed Vaizey who have committed to support the Action Group by lobbying at Westminster together. It’s good to know that support continues to grow and we should be very grateful to the coordinator of the Group Peter Rutt, who is doing an outstanding job.