**REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS FEBRUARY 2019**

**FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE**

**BUDGET**

**COMMUNITIES TO BE OFFERED HELP WITH YOUTH SERVICES**

Young people and their families in Oxfordshire are now set to benefit from improved community-run youth services if county councillors agree grant funding when they set the council’s budget next week. Youth groups will be invited to bid in to a £1m fund over two years, with encouragement to find match-funding from their local communities. Feedback from residents points to strong support for improving community-run youth services, and this money would help existing projects expand and new ones get off the ground. By offering start-up funding, the council has already helped many community-run groups provide support for young children and families, and it is hoped the same could happen for youth services. Community-run youth services would complement the work of the county council’s Children’s Services department, which targets its resources at children at risk of abuse and neglect. This proposal has been made possible by better than expected Council Tax collection following growth in Oxfordshire.

**COUNTY COUNCIL TO INVEST IN SCHOOLS, TRANSPORT AND STREETLIGHTING**

Residents of Oxfordshire will see highway improvements, new school buildings and energy-efficient streetlighting thanks to a £1 billion investment over the next ten years as part of the county council’s budget. However, the county council is also warning that funding pressure on services remains as demand for social care for vulnerable children and adults continues grow and continued financial prudence is required to meet those demands.

Transport schemes across the county are set for funding approval so the county council can improve journeys for drivers, pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. Nearly £20m will be invested to increase the provision of school places for children with special needs in the county, including rebuilding Northfield School in Oxford with more pupil places.

The proposed capital programme includes government funding through the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, agreed by all Oxfordshire councils. Elsewhere in the Capital Programme a £41m street lighting improvement programme continues to be part of the investment plan, with traditional lanterns to be replaced with more energy efficient LED lighting, saving money in the long-run. The ten-year capital programme is part of the council’s proposed budget for next year, which has been put forward following public consultation. The proposals will be put before all councillors on 12 February 2019.

To make sure the growing number of children at risk of abuse and neglect are protected, the children’s social care budget has increased annually. It was £46m in 2011 and is forecast to be £95m in 2022/23 – more than doubling in ten years.

The council’s budget for adult social care could increase by £5m in 2019/20, with further annual increases reaching nearly £6m by 2022/23 to increase support for the growing number of older and disabled people.

OCC is now reviewing the digital technology needed to make the council run more effectively and efficiently, including improving customer service by making it easier to access services online. The council has identified savings of £50m from changing the way services are delivered and has already started implementing these changes, including improving online ‘self-service’ HR and finance systems used by staff. As part of the partnership with Cherwell District Council, legal services for the two councils are being joined up.

**CASH BOOST FOR FUTURE OF TRANSPORT IN OXFORDSHIRE**

Oxfordshire’s road users could see a technological revolution take place in the coming years that could involve important traffic information being used to help them to get around more easily thanks to a successful bid for £1.25m of Government funding. The cash, which has been through the national GovTech Catalyst initiative towards work to transform the existing Oxfordshire traffic management system – ready for the Government’s hoped-for introduction of connected vehicles by 2021 as well as other new mobility options, such as electric vehicles. Many people think of the new wave of transport in terms of cars. However, connected vehicles – anything that can be linked up via the internet to a wider system – could mean vans, buses, lorries, motor or pedal cycles. Even wheelchairs could take advantage of new technology to get around more easily. Everyone stands to benefit. Oxfordshire’s money will pay for researching how data – of which there is lots and from varied sources – could be used to help manage traffic in the future.

**MORE THAN 40,000 ROAD DEFECTS REPAIRED IN OXFORDSHIRE SINCE LAST WINTER**

OCC’s highways teams are out daily relentlessly resurfacing roads and pavements. They have been able to more work than last year thanks to the county council putting in extra cash over and above the normal budget in response to the problems caused during the last cold spell. Since January 2018 the council has repaired 40,117 defects. That’s an average of 3,652 repairs a month which is quite colossal compared to what was needed during the same time period the year before – a total of 34,677 defects were repaired between Jan-Dec 2017. Due to severe weather last winter, pothole fixing peaked between February and May with nearly 18,000 being repaired. The county council this year invested an extra £10m in road repairs which has resulted in extra major resurfacing projects being completed as well as smaller, but no less important, repairs being completed across Oxfordshire.

**BERINSFIELD BUS CLUB TO BE ESTABLISHED**

I am delighted that thanks to some great collaborative work between Jon Alcantara, the Europa School parent who runs the current Culham Bus Club, and the County Council, there will be a return bus service running from Berinsfield to Abingdon from now on. As it looks as if the Oxford Academy will be oversubscribed for places in September 2019, all new pupils getting places at Larkmead, Fitzharries, and John Mason will be entitled to free transport as their other nearest school (Wallingford) is also going to be full. I hope this great news will reassure parents that there will no longer be any financial barrier to their children going to the excellent Abingdon schools, which I know would be their preference.

**CULHAM TO GET SPEED LIMIT REDUCTION**

I agreed to fund an application from Culham Parish Council for a 40mph speed limit to be imposed all along the A415 between the 30mph limit at Abingdon and Culham, and along the length of the Burycroft. This new speed limit should be in place by early in April.