

COUNTY COUNCILLORS' NEWSLETTER

April / May 2018

from Nick Carter & Jeannette Matelot

CARE REVIEW

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has completed a review of Oxfordshire's social care system, and its final report provides areas of action for senior managers in the NHS, social care and other bodies to make the whole health and care system work better.

Across all areas of health and social care, an above-average proportion of services achieve a 'good' or 'outstanding' CQC rating, compared with the national average.

Following its visit to the County Council, the CQC report says: "People were treated with kindness when they moved between health and social care services.

"Frontline staff were dedicated and provided person-centred care, going the extra mile for people they cared for."

However, there remain significant challenges to join up services across different organisations in the county. All of the CQC's recommendations for action have been agreed by the five organisations involved, which are:

- The County Council
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust.

CQC inspectors found the problems of recruiting care staff in Oxfordshire were holding back improvement. Incompatible computer systems also hampered integration of services. The inspectors did find that Oxfordshire had made progress in tackling 'delayed transfers of care'.

Health and social care leaders from the five organisations involved in the inspection have met the CQC to develop an action plan. The key points of this are:

- Making services more local by using a 'place-based' approach to design and deliver care;
- Improving information available to people who fund their own care so they get the support they need more quickly;
- Investing more in recruitment and retention of care staff so that more care packages can be delivered, particularly for older people.

GENDER PAY GAP

The County Council released its 'gender pay gap' figures ahead of the recent Government deadline, showing a 'mean' gender pay gap of 3.5% and a 'median' gap of 0.1%.

The median gap is the difference between the midpoints in the ranges of pay for men and women. The mean gap is the difference between the average of pay for men and women.

Oxfordshire compares favourably to neighbouring county councils and other councils in the South and Midlands. Comparisons can be made using this website: <https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/>

OCC's Gender Pay Gap Report provides additional details such as:

- the balance of men and women in the different organisational levels;
- the difference between a gender pay gap and unequal pay, and information on its Equality Policy;
- plans to improve gender equality and other forms of equality in the workforce.

GROWTH DEAL

The Oxfordshire Growth Board has now finalised a long-awaited Housing and Growth Agreement (known as the 'Growth Deal') with the 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.

The Growth Deal has now been signed by the six local authorities in Oxfordshire, which make up the Growth Board, and countersigned by Housing Minister Dominic Raab. Along with the County Council, the Board also includes the five district councils and the county's Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP).

March saw the Board announce the first year of projects to be funded by an initial release of £30m for infrastructure projects as part of the Growth Deal.

Government road money is for major improvements and cannot be used for day-to-day maintenance, but the County says the investment will help to improve the overall standard of the road network.

VILLAGE UNDER SIEGE

Villagers in Tetsworth are feeling besieged by a number of proposed developments, some of which may have an impact on a wider area.

1) An appeal into a proposed new housing estate resumes at the end of April. Tetsworth Parish Council and residents are opposing the plan to build 60 houses on a field in the village.

Campaigners comment: "Should the Inspector uphold the developer's appeal, it would result in Tetsworth being committed to housing growth of around 40% in a period of just a few years, taking into account houses already delivered or in the pipeline.

"Such a rate of growth would dramatically alter the character of our village."

The appeal hearing takes place on 26-27 April in the village's Memorial Hall.

2) A 12-pitch 'traveller' site is proposed on the western edge of the village. Planning permission was originally refused after overwhelming opposition by residents and the District Council's planning officers.

But the applicant lodged an appeal, which is due to be heard in August, and has also submitted a second planning application for a similar development on the site. SODC will have to decide on the new application by mid-June, and meanwhile, donations from villagers have enabled the Parish Council to engage a barrister and town planner to fight the appeal in August.

More than 300 villagers lodged objections to the original planning application, and the parish council is anticipating similar opposition to the developer's new proposal.

3) Tetsworth Parish Council has joined a campaign by more than 30 other parishes in East Oxfordshire to influence the Government's plans for an Oxford-Cambridge Expressway.

The campaign is lobbying Highways England, before this Government agency decides on the likely corridor in which the new motorway will be routed. The so-called 'expressway' would run from Didcot to Milton Keynes, and one of the possible corridors would cross the M40 and A40 near Tetsworth.

The Parish Council comments: "Such a route would pass close to the strategic development sites in SODC's emerging local plan and could be attractive to the District Council and to the Oxfordshire Growth Board on the grounds of its growth potential.

"But another motorway just to the west of Tetsworth would result in far greater noise and air pollution affecting us and would further erode the attractiveness of our village."

The multi-parish campaign, called the Expressway Action Group, is calling on Highways England to choose a corridor for the new motorway that would create the least possible harm to the environment, wildlife and heritage. However, the biggest parish in this area, Thame Town Council, has decided not to join the group.

4) Tetsworth is also supporting a campaign called the Haseley Brook Action Group, which is opposing plans for a massive new town to be built on agricultural fields between the village and Great Milton.

The proposal, known as Harrington New Town, would consist of around 6500 homes as well as schools, shops and other infrastructure. If it were to go ahead, the eastern edge of the development is likely to be just yards from Tetsworth.

The Parish Council warns: "If it were to find its way into SODC's final Local Plan, it would utterly destroy the character of Tetsworth and result in a decade-long building site on our doorstep."

HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE

The Government has announced 44 bids which have made it to stage 2 of its Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) for major infrastructure projects.

Two of the three HIF bids submitted by OCC last autumn are on the list and will now progress to a co-development stage:

1. Didcot Garden Town – £171m is sought for transport improvements including Didcot Science Bridge and A4130 dual carriageway, a new river crossing at the Culham and Clifton Hampden bypass. This would support the delivery of over 22,000 homes in Didcot, Culham, Harwell and Berinsfield. Additionally, up to £70m of cycle and other sustainable transport improvements are proposed for inclusion in the bid plan.
2. West Oxfordshire Garden Village – £135m is sought for further upgrades to the A40, building on existing schemes and based on a strategy which includes development of the Rapid Transit network and additional highway capacity on the A40 corridor. This would support the delivery of over 10,000 homes in Witney, Carterton, and around Eynsham.

Detailed business plans are now being developed for the £300 million of transport infrastructure investment behind these two bids.

The Growth Board partners expect to hear this autumn whether the two bids have succeeded.

FUND FOR COUNCILLOR PRIORITIES

A £1m 'councillor priority fund' will run for two years, allocating £15k pa to be spent on community projects at the discretion of each of the 63 county councillors.

The funding will go to projects or services which meet a recognised community need and pump-prime an activity, rather than fund an on-going commitment.

Jeannette and Nick will be discussing their priorities with a range of organisations including the local town and parish councils. Resources could be pooled in the Thame & Chinnor area, or within a wider locality in order to address priorities in a sustainable way.

The funds are intended to address recognised needs of local communities and projects with defined costs and timescales. They cannot be used for a project that duplicates an existing service, or that is the responsibility of a statutory body.

For further information, see:

https://m.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/councillor-priority-fund?utm_source=FURL-1&utm_medium=councillorpriorityfund&utm_term=90432&utm_content=&utm_campaign=councillpriorityfund

HEALTHWATCH SURVEY

Healthwatch Oxfordshire is the county's health and social care watchdog which looks after the interests of patients.

It collects patients' opinions and experiences in order to inform and influence those who run the local health and social care services.

Healthwatch is currently gathering people's experiences of using NHS dental services in Oxfordshire.

It says: "We want to hear if using an NHS dentist has been good, bad or just impossible."

It explains: "We listen to your experiences of health and social services in Oxfordshire so that together we can help to improve the services upon which most of us rely.

"We also provide information in plain English so that you can find your way round the health and social service system."

All responses to the survey of NHS dental services are anonymous, and the survey takes less than 5 minutes to complete. It's at the following link:

<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/filling-the-gaps-your-views-on-nhs-dentistry-in-oxfordshire/>

Healthwatch adds: "We have the strength of the law behind us. That means that those who run and pay for the services must respond to your concerns and our recommendations.

"They must explain what actions they will take or why they are not taking action. We get your concerns heard by those who shape our vital services."

Healthwatch Oxfordshire is seeking additional trustees to help lead the organisation through the next phase of its development.

The role of a trustee requires people with a strong commitment to improving local health and social care services, who have the skills or experience needed to direct and oversee the setting and implementation of the organisation's strategy and work programme.

Further details are here:

<https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/news/healthwatch-oxfordshire-is-looking-for-new-board-members/>

ROAD CLOSURE

The main B4445 road from Thame to Chinnor will be closed from 4-8 June while a section of the road at Emmington is being resurfaced.

Access will be maintained for emergency service vehicles and for those frontages within the closure area, subject to liaison with the works supervisor. Access to Sydenham for everyone else will be via Postcombe or Kingston Blount.

Further information regarding the works may be obtained by contacting Tim Belton or Mo Clark, Oxfordshire County Council on [0345 310 11 11](tel:03453101111).

SME GRANTS AWARDED

A Thame firm is one of the latest beneficiaries of a grant scheme aimed at boosting growth and jobs amongst Oxfordshire's small businesses.

The grants are part of the Elevate programme run by Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Long-established tree contractors, Four Seasons Tree Care from Thame, were awarded £4,500 to rebrand their business as part of an ambitious growth plan which could create six new jobs.

MD Matt Vaughan said the firm plans to grow by 20% every year.

He added: "This award means we can kickstart a marketing campaign including a new website, logo and livery as well as new branded workwear for our staff. Without the grant, we would have taken much longer to bring about the changes necessary to move the business forwards."

Almost 90% of businesses in Oxfordshire employ fewer than a dozen people, and their continued success is important to growing the local economy.

In addition to grants, OxLEP's Elevate programme offers help to SMEs through a series of free workshops and one-to-one support.

Helen Brind, who manages Elevate, said: "The latest awards are part of the third round of grants, and we have three more rounds to come, so there is still time for people to apply.

"The scope of ambition amongst the county's businesses, including start-ups is incredible."

The Elevate grants are available to start-ups, new businesses and established SMEs. New businesses can get up to £3,000, while more established businesses could secure up to £8,000. The grants are awarded for up to 33% of project costs.

The next round of grant applications is now open, and the team can offer advice to new businesses on how to make a good application. Requests for guidance must be submitted before 21st May.

The deadline for Round 4 applications is 31st May. Details of Elevate grants, workshops and support are at: www.oxfordshirebusinesssupport.co.uk

POTHOLE FUND BOOSTED

The Government has announced a further £100 million to help repair potholes and storm damage after the severe winter weather.

Nationally, this money will help repair almost 2 million potholes and help protect the roads from future severe weather.

This is on top of £75m in government funding to councils as a Pothole Action Fund this year, as well as a £46m boost for highway authorities announced before Christmas.

Oxfordshire's share of these funds comes to nearly £3m.

Nationally, the estimated highways maintenance backlog has fallen by almost 23% this year to £9.3bn from £12bn.

Figures compiled as part of the Annual Local Authority Road Maintenance (ALARM) survey, commissioned by the asphalt industry, represent the best result for local authorities in roughly a decade, according to a report in the Municipal Journal.

PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES

More than 7,000 Oxfordshire children were allocated primary school places on 16th April.

With over 8,600 places available and a smaller cohort than last year, the County was expecting a large proportion of first preferences to be met this year.

Last year nearly 94% of Oxfordshire families were offered their first preference school.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Ofsted has been inspecting the County's Children's Services in mid-April. This was what Ofsted refers to as a "short inspection", meaning that it has only spent three days in the County Council offices.

The inspection has been carried out under Ofsted's new 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) framework and will result in a rating of Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement or Inadequate. The outcome will be known in May.

FIRE SERVICE TRIAL

Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service (OFRS) is considering a number of new initiatives in a review of its Community Risk Management Plan.

One of these is the possibility of creating 'community safety wardens' as a trial project.

OFRS says its focus is increasingly on emergency calls and new roles such as responding to medical emergencies. As a result, it needs to help communities and individuals to be more involved with the prevention activities and resilience which underpin community safety.

A support system of wardens is likely to be trialled through local fire stations which are located in the heart of the community. It would enable OFRS to explore the potential for local 'safety advocates' to coordinate a number of the service's efforts and initiatives in market towns.

PLASTIC POLLUTION

Residents in Oxfordshire have been amongst the best at recycling (including plastics) and composting for a few years now, and the countywide recycling rate is around 60%, one of the best in the country.

However, the ambition is to do better, particularly with plastics. OCC's Recycling Team offers the following tips to kick the plastic habit:

- Remember your reusable bags when shopping.
- Invest in a reusable water bottle (stainless steel bottles are more sustainable than plastic).
- For takeaway coffee, use a reusable mug. Collapsible ones that fit easily in a bag are obtainable, or there are ones made from bamboo to avoid more plastic. Disposable coffee cups are lined with plastic and hard to recycle.
- Look for products with less packaging, or no packaging, especially when buying fruit and vegetables.
- Buy concentrated products and refill packs instead of fully packaged products, such as fabric conditioner, washing powders and some beauty products.
- Recycle the packaging where possible. While 90% of packaging is recycled in the kitchen, only 50% is being recycled in the bathroom. Shampoo, conditioner, make-up, hand-wash and cleaning product bottles can all be recycled (pump triggers must be removed).
- If possible, buy larger or economy sizes of goods such as breakfast cereal, tomato ketchup, toilet rolls and soap powder. This saves money and creates less packaging in the long run.

Householders are encouraged to give their views on reducing waste and increasing recycling via an online consultation here: www.recycleforoxfordshire.org.uk

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (aka TOE2) was established in 2011 as an environmental funder for Oxfordshire, supporting local community environmental projects. Three examples of recent projects are set out below.

TOE2 is both a grant-seeking and a grant-making organisation, working closely with the key environmental organisations in order to 'put people and places together'. This role has been endorsed by the Bishop of Oxford, who says:

"TOE2 performs the crucial task of making connections. It connects the strategic with the local, vision with practicality, and funding with need. By working with three key areas it has focus; by responding to local energy it has flexibility. It seems to me that everyone is a winner."

In the face of a massive house and road building programme over the next 20 years, the environment is under more pressure than ever before, with loss of habitat and changes in land management.

In Oxfordshire, there are more than 150 local environmental community groups, a very high concentration compared to other counties. TOE2 estimates that hundreds of thousands of people of all ages regularly play an active part in the protection of Oxfordshire's countryside.

Local volunteers are involved in hands-on, practical community projects ranging from village pond restoration and woodland planting, to the management of commons and meadow creation.

TOE2 is well placed to provide these groups with support and funding. Further information at: <http://www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk> and <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/countryside>

RECENT TOE2 PROJECTS

1) The footpath between Aston Rowant and Kingston Blount has benefited from a recent grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire, with funds from Grundon Waste Management.

The footpath is heavily used by parishioners and by children walking to school. It now has a new all-weather surface and base layer and sides bordered with recycled plastic. The work took place during dry weather, when contractor's vehicles could travel across the field without damage and the path could stay open during the work. The result is that children can now walk to school throughout the year, reducing their carbon footprint.

The path was officially opened at the end of last year, with schoolchildren, parish council representatives and funders all attending.

2) Access around Chinnor has been improved by replacing stiles with five new gates on the Lewknor 4 footpath.

The aim of this project was to make the footpath more accessible to walkers of all capabilities whilst ensuring the safety of any livestock (currently Shetland ponies and horses) in the fields.

A mobility gate was also installed to allow access for OCC's mowing team, to ensure that the path remains in a good state of repair.

The Lewknor 4 path not only provides a link between Postcombe and Copcourt, but also to a number of other public rights of way.

The Trust for Oxfordshire provided a grant of £1792 for the project, also with funds from Grundon, to complete the works over the course of several months in the latter half of 2017.

3) If you've visited Cuttle Brook Nature Reserve recently, you will have seen a hive of volunteer activity, supported by TOE2.

They have been working hard to improve the biodiversity of the site and to improve access for more people to enjoy this wildlife haven in the middle of Thame. One example is a fish-spawning bed that has been created below the rail bridge.

These works were supported by TOE2 with funds from South Oxfordshire District Council. There is more to be done, and more volunteers would be welcome. Please contact: <http://cuttlebrook.org.uk/what-we-do/> and <http://riverthame.org/cuttlebrook-conservation-volunteers/> and <http://riverthame.org/upper-river-thame/>

OXFORD ROAD FLOODING

Residents in and around Oxford Road, Thame, have been plagued by leaking water flowing down the road and pooling near the bridge.

By early March, OCC had achieved a partial solution to the problem by ensuring that Thames Water repaired its water main (completed in February).

The gulleys and drains were cleaned out in early March, which left one further problem - water continuing to flow from a British Telecom chamber in the road. BT has been sent a 'Section 81' notice to get it fixed.

AWARDS FOR VOLUNTEERS

The County Council sponsors the Charity of the Year Award in the annual awards scheme run by Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action (OCVA).

The Charity of the Year Award is aimed at charities that are rooted in their communities in Oxfordshire. They can be large or small, with either a rural or urban focus, and with a local or more wide-ranging impact.

This year a new award is also being sponsored by South Oxfordshire District Council for charitable, voluntary or community groups in the area to demonstrate and publicise the impact that they have made on their local community.

The OCVA annual awards also recognise a dozen other categories of charitable and voluntary activity. The judging takes place in May and the presentations in June. Further information at:

<https://ocva.org.uk/oxfordshire-charity-and-volunteer-awards-2018-what-you-need-to-know/>

IN BRIEF

FORMER DEPUTY LEADER DIES

Rodney Rose, the County's deputy leader until last year, died on 17th March.

Nick Carter, in particular, will miss him greatly as a friend and colleague, having worked together on OCC's Cabinet for several years.

Rodney represented the Charlbury & Wychwood area from 2005-17. Latterly, as Deputy Leader, he worked on several major projects that will benefit Oxfordshire residents, including the east-west rail scheme and the planned flood alleviation scheme around west Oxford. These will be his legacy as a public servant.

'LIVE WELL' WEBSITE

OCC's Adult Social Care team is raising awareness of its 'Live Well Oxfordshire' website.

Live Well Oxfordshire brings together over 2,000 services and activities in one searchable online directory – from residential care homes and care services that help people stay living at home, to transport services and new hobbies.

Details are here: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/livewell

SOCIAL CARE RECRUITING

A recruitment drive to encourage more people in Oxfordshire to consider a career as a care worker has attracted more applicants in five months than in the previous two years.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has warned that the Government's plan for council financing risks leaving adult social care inadequately and inconsistently funded across England.

The think-tank warns that, unless funding is addressed, social care could account for half of all taxes raised by local authorities by 2035, squeezing other local services and resulting in inconsistent access to care.

The IFS commented: "The Government has to decide whether adult social care is ultimately a local responsibility, where councils can offer different levels of service, or a national responsibility with common standards."

MAY DAY CELEBRATION

New measures have been introduced to tackle the large crowds during Oxford's annual May Day celebration after a record-breaking 27,000 people descended on the city last year, with large numbers congregating on the High Street and Magdalen Bridge.

One-way channels are to be introduced to help the crowds flow more easily, after people were blocked in when they tried to leave in 2017, while bicycles, either ridden or pushed, will be banned from the bridge.

FLY-TIPPING PENALTIES

Fixed penalties of up to £400 are to be introduced for illegal dumping of household waste.

The Government says the move is to deter the use of unlicensed operators, who undercut licensed tradesmen and illegally dump waste, with councils rarely prosecuting due to the high cost of court cases.

Incidents of flytipping were up 7% last year to more than 1m, with two thirds involving household waste.