

## **COUNTY COUNCILLORS' NEWSLETTER**

**June / July 2018**

*from Nick Carter & Jeannette Matelot*

### **Special Needs transport**

Arguments came to a head in mid-June over the increasing cost incurred by OCC to provide home-to-school transport for pupils with special educational needs.

Members of a scrutiny committee warned the County Cabinet against making £300,000 of cuts to this vital service for SEN children.

In response to calls by families in the Thame & Chinnor area who would be affected by restrictions in the service, Nick Carter attended the meeting and criticised the nature of the proposed cuts.

He said they had not been planned strategically and failed to take account of individual families' needs. The proposal for the SEN transport service had also been made in isolation of a broader review which was due to examine the Council's services for SEN, disabled and high-needs children.

As a result, the scrutiny committee urged the Cabinet to reject the proposed cuts and to await the result of the overall review.

### **Home-to-School transport**

New research shows the pressure that county councils are under in delivering home-to-school transport, because they pay a 'rural premium' to provide these services.

All county councils have recently had little option but to scale back free home-to-school transport services to a statutory minimum. Pupils under the age of eight are eligible for free transport if they live over two miles from their school, and pupils over the age of eight are eligible if they live over three miles from their school.

There are significantly higher costs to deliver home-to-school transport in rural areas. Oxfordshire spends around £100 per pupil, and the county average is £93 per pupil in 2016/17. This compares with £10 on average for pupils in city and metropolitan borough authorities.

Counties have more pupils who are eligible for free transport owing to their rurality, and face higher costs of transporting pupils over longer distances. Between 2013-2017, 29 out of 36 surveyed counties reduced their yearly expenditure on home-to-school transport.

The context of this expenditure is what's known as 'core funding' from the Government. By the end of this decade, a county such as Oxfordshire will be receiving £161 of core funding per head compared to an average of £266 in England and £459 in London, and their funding from the Government will almost half over that period.

School transport is largely funded by these Government grants. The County Councils Network (CCN) is calling on the Government to recognise the increased costs of delivering services – such as school transport – in rural settings as part of its fair funding review. The CCN argues that the fair funding review must address the historic underfunding of county councils, as well as the increased costs of delivering services in rural settings.

The CCN research also shows that home-to-school transport for pupils with special educational needs is also becoming an increasingly large financial pressure.

## **Sharing services with Cherwell District Council**

OCC and Cherwell District Council are planning to share a range of back-office services and operate under a joint chief executive, while retaining separate councillors and budgets.

For several years Cherwell, which is centred on Banbury and covers the north of Oxfordshire, has had a close administrative partnership with South Northants District Council. But the latter is now being absorbed into a unitary authority which replaces the defunct Northants County Council.

OCC offered to replace that partnership in order to help Cherwell to continue delivering good services to its residents. The County also believes this joint arrangement will help to secure investment in infrastructure in Oxfordshire. The exact arrangements for sharing services and joining up functions are now being worked out and will be implemented incrementally.

The proposed partnership is not initially connected with the County's longer-term unitary reorganisation proposals, and for the time being it will offer an innovative opportunity to make 'two-tier' local government more effective.

## **St Andrew's Primary School, Chinnor**

The County Council is planning to expand St Andrew's CofE Primary School, Chinnor, from 1.5-form entry to 2-form entry.

The school's current capacity is 315 pupils, and the proposed capacity will be 420. The current annual admission number for the school is 45, and the proposed number will be 60. New accommodation arrangements are being appraised.

## **New Chief wants to get involved**

One of the County's key partners, Thames Valley Police, has expanded its top political team with the appointment of a full-time Deputy Police & Crime Commissioner.

Matthew Barber was previously leader of the Vale of White Horse district council and remains a district councillor in south-west Oxfordshire. In his new role, he is now working on plans to reach out to community groups.

He said: "I am keen to meet with local residents groups and other voluntary organisations who may have issues regarding policing. Do please let me know if I can assist in your community."

Reacting to the appointment of Sajid Javid as the new Home Secretary, he commented: "I am hopeful that he will bring fresh thinking to the Home Office, particularly getting to grips with the police funding formula.

"The formula that distributes funding between police forces leaves Thames Valley significantly worse off per head of population when compared with other large forces."

He added: "We need continued support to ensure the police have the tools to protect the public from the changing threats of modern crime. I hope that the new Home Secretary will deliver that support."

## **Rural crime rates**

Knife crime in the Thames Valley region has increased by 50% since 2014. Home Office figures show that although knife crime is up 20% in London over three years, the increases in the home counties are far steeper.

Vince O'Brien, head of drugs operations at the National Crime Agency (NCA), said: "There is an increasing level of violence coming from city gangs establishing themselves in new drugs markets in rural areas."

Andy Higgins, research director for the Police Foundation think-tank, added that organised crime groups sending 'drugs mules' across county lines are fuelling the rise in violence.

Knife crimes in Hertfordshire are up 150% from 2014-2017; Hampshire is up 102%, Cambridgeshire 83%, Warwickshire 180%, Bedfordshire 86%, Essex 86%, and Thames Valley 50%. Norfolk's knife crime rate has surged by 274%.

Meanwhile, rural insurer NFU Mutual has warned that Britain's countryside is in the grip of a crime wave, as latest figures reveal a sharp rise in the cost of rural thefts.

Initial estimates from the insurer show theft cost the UK's farms, rural homes and businesses a staggering £44.5m in 2017, the highest level since 2013.

Analysis of NFU Mutual's claim statistics reveals 2017 saw an increase of 13.4% – the highest year-on-year percentage rise since 2010. The steepest rises were in south-east England.

### **Crime survey**

Questions in the recent 2018 National Rural Crime Survey covered a range of issues – from whether people report crimes to the impact that anti-social behaviour has on rural life. The survey also asked whether respondents believe enough is done to catch offenders.

The previous survey took place in 2015, when 13,000 people responded to give their impressions of crime and anti-social behaviour. The results revealed the cost of rural crime to the country was significant – around £800m every year.

The survey aims to determine the true personal, social and economic cost of rural crime and anti-social behaviour across the country. The organisers say it will provide a clear picture of what has improved, what challenges remain and what more government, police forces and other organisations can do to support isolated areas.

Submissions closed in early June, and the results will be reported later this year.

### **County retains 'good' Ofsted rating**

In the face of increasing numbers of children at risk of neglect and abuse, OCC's care service has received an overall 'Good' rating from Ofsted.

This is the third time running that the County has received the 'Good' rating after an inspection by Ofsted, the children's services watchdog. The inspection was published on 22nd May.

The watchdog's report praised the way staff are dealing with a huge rise in the number of children needing protection from abuse and neglect since 2015, and the rise in admissions to care. These increases are being driven by better reporting and awareness by people working with children and families, including schools, police, nurses and GPs.

Ofsted praised the County Council and found that when children are at risk of harm, prompt action is taken to understand their circumstances and protect them. Both children in care and care-leavers receive a good service.

The report said more still needs to be done to ensure that children suffering from neglect are getting the right help at the right time, to reduce the impact of neglect on their young lives. While most children needing help and protection are well-served, this needs to be more consistent.

There has been a 45% increase in the number of cases of neglect since 2015, and this has presented a challenge to the Council at a time of budget pressures. Despite this, the County has acknowledged Ofsted's findings and is committed to improving its handling of neglect cases.

Neglect often occurs in families where drug and alcohol misuse, domestic abuse or mental health issues are prevalent, but it includes any situation in which a child is being put at risk of serious harm because their needs are not being met. It can be difficult to identify and ensure the right action is being taken by a wide range of professionals.

Ofsted's report acknowledges the positive impact of recent service changes. The fact that more cases are being reported shows that OCC is working well with the police, GPs and schools.

The County has put in place an earlier checkpoint in the progress of a child protection case. This ensures that help for parents is accelerated and reduces the risk to children within their family home, or moves towards formal proceedings if their safety is not improving.

The Council also works with health and educational professionals to ensure all social workers, doctors, nurses and teachers have access to expert methods and training to achieve success in neglect cases.

In recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of children needing help and protection, with the number of children in care rising to 700 in 2018, up from around 500 in 2015. More than 720 children were on a child protection plan at the end of March 2018, compared with 569 on the same date three years ago.

Neglect remains by far the most common reason for children either coming into the care system or being placed on a Child Protection Plan. Assessments of children at risk of neglect also increased from 633 to 918 between 2015 and 2017.

Ofsted inspectors praised recent service changes which they said had resulted in "an improved early help service, increased capacity in frontline staffing and an enhanced service for children in care". They also highlighted the professionalism and dedication of social workers for making a positive impact in the experiences and progress of children in care.

### **Care homes inspected**

The Care Quality Commission has published its latest round of inspection reports, including the following Oxfordshire care providers:

- Brownbill Associates, Thame, rated overall 'Good', full report at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-248242141>
- OSJCT Chilterns Court Care Centre, Henley, rated overall 'Requires Improvement', full report at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-3080743969>
- The Smile Practice, Oxford, full report at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-1630121888>
- St John's Home, Oxford, rated overall 'Good', full report at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-3198027598>
- OSJCT Langford View, Bicester, rated overall 'Good', full report at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-409931314>
- Enable Health Ltd, Cowley, rated overall 'Requires Improvement', full report at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-2860511845>
- Oasis Private Care Ltd, Steventon, Abingdon, rated overall 'Inadequate'. Full report at <http://www.cqc.org.uk/location/1-138602925>

### **HS2 Road Safety Fund**

OCC has been awarded funding by the Department of Transport for road safety schemes along the line of the proposed Phase 1 HS2 rail project.

These schemes could support traffic calming, safer road junctions and new or improved pedestrian crossings. Funding could also be used for schemes to improve cycle safety.

Jeannette and Nick are discussing the allocation of funding with County officers. Any eligible schemes would also need to provide a legacy for improved road safety for communities once the HS2 project is complete. There are likely to be more ideas than there is funding for, so a risk assessment for each proposal will be used to prioritise schemes for HS2's approval.

## **Patient care survey**

People who have used an ambulance in the past year are invited to respond to a survey which will help to shape the service's future.

South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) is running a patient care survey. As an NHS Foundation Trust and one of the County Council's partners, the SCAS takes account of feedback and views from local communities who use its emergency and non-emergency services.

Information is submitted anonymously via <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/875TF3G>

The deadline for submissions is Sunday 24th June. A summary of the results will be included on the Trust's website and will be published by Healthwatch Oxfordshire. Further information or hard copies of the survey are available from Monica Moro on 01869 365126, or at [getinvolved@scas.nhs.uk](mailto:getinvolved@scas.nhs.uk)

## **Expressway update**

As the highways authority, OCC was asked for its views on the proposed Oxford to Cambridge Expressway. Its submission says that until Highways England publishes a preferred route, the County cannot make a formal response on the proposal.

The key points from this initial response in April 2018 are:

At this stage, OCC is not able to indicate a corridor preference, given that the technical and other supporting work required to inform the decision on a preferred corridor is not yet complete.

OCC supports the strategic objectives and purpose of the Expressway project, recognising the opportunity it brings to support and enable growth and development, enhance connectivity and take forward innovation and smart technology. However, there are some important principles which should be integral to the selection of a corridor through Oxfordshire. These include:

1. Ensuring that the Expressway corridor does not increase pressure on the existing, already overstretched strategic highway network. Specifically, the Expressway must not use the section of the A34 through central Oxfordshire. This section is where the A34 currently operates as both a regional/national strategic route and a local distributor route (forming part of the Oxford Ring Road). It is essential that the Expressway takes a separate strategic route to avoid this conflict of use;
2. Ensuring that the Expressway corridor minimises the impact on the existing highway network, i.e. it should not use existing local road networks or draw significant strategic traffic directly into local road networks / highway infrastructure which would not be able to cope;
3. Ensuring that the Expressway is developed separately alongside locally planned highway enhancements.

Further information is available from the Highways England website.

## **Additional pothole machine**

OCC and its contractors, Skanska, have taken delivery of another 'Dragon-Patcher' machine which uses a combination of compressed air, heat, bitumen and chippings to repair potholes.

There are now two machines working full-time in the county, with a third being shared with Cambridgeshire.

Because it can repair a number of holes at the same time, and much faster, a Dragon-Patcher can carry out repairs far more cheaply than before. A typical Dragon repair costs about £14, while one fixed using conventional methods on a non-rural road costs about £60.

On a good day, a Dragon can repair 200 potholes. More work is done and more money is saved for further resurfacing. The Dragon also carries out preventive work by sealing cracks in the road surface that would otherwise let in water and eventually turn into more potholes.

### **HGVs on rural roads**

Villagers throughout Oxfordshire are working with the County's trading standards team to police the scourge of heavy lorries ignoring weight limits on rural roads and bridges.

Three out of the four most recent prosecutions in magistrates' courts have come about after members of the public reported the drivers and their vehicles to the Council.

Enforcement officer Simon Mitchell comments: "While we and the police do actively patrol hotspots, our partnership approach with local residents is proving very successful. Since February 2016, there have been 100 prosecutions for breaching weight restrictions brought by Oxfordshire Trading Standards resulting in £55,790 in fines.

A further 57 cases are under active investigation. In total, 660 formal warning letters have also been issued to HGV drivers as a result of investigations into public reports and vehicles seen by patrolling Trading Standards Officers.

### **Care worker recruitment campaign**

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

The campaign, called 'Make a difference every day', features a number of care workers talking about the rewards of the job and why they would recommend it to others.

The Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers (OACP) website received 84 applications for a variety of care work roles between mid-November 2017 and the end of March 2018, compared with 66 applications in the two years between November 2015 and October 2017.

The County has around 14,200 people working in adult social care. But Oxfordshire's ageing population is growing at twice the average, so there is still an urgent need for more care workers to support older, frail people in their own homes, in nursing and residential homes or in community hospital settings.

### **Council probes reservoir proposals**

OCC has raised a series of questions about Thames Water's plans to build a vast reservoir to the south of Abingdon.

The proposal is part of the utility company's wider strategy for South-East England in coming decades. It says the new reservoir, between Steventon and Marcham, would not only support the forecast needs of the Thames Water area but also some of the needs of the wider South-East.

In response to a consultation, the County has asked for more detail on Thames Water's calculations for growth in population and water usage for coming years that underpin the reservoir proposal. The Council also wants to know how much of the water from the reservoir would be sold to other water companies.

It urged Thames Water to speed up the programme of leakage reduction to delay the need for a reservoir as long as possible, and it pointed out that there is a lack of clarity whether other potential sites have been assessed across the South East region.

### **Question time for health & care**

The National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) is holding a Question Time event in Oxford on July 18.

The event will be a unique opportunity to put questions directly to the Chairman, Chief Executive and senior managers. For example, questioners may want to ask how NICE quality standards and guidelines are supporting and improving local patient care and service delivery.

The event is open to the public and patients, as well as NHS and healthcare professionals. Following the Question Time, NICE will hold a public board meeting, also open to all. The papers for the meeting will be available shortly before the event on the NICE website <https://www.nice.org.uk/Oxford2018>

The event is at Oxford Town Hall, St Aldate's, OX1 1BX. The questions session is 12.30pm-1.30pm, and the board meeting from 1.30pm-4.30pm. There is no charge for attending, but numbers are limited, and attendees should register at <https://www.nice.org.uk/Oxford2018>

### **Increasing care costs**

Changes to the way people contribute to the cost of their care in Oxfordshire will see some people charged more so that resources can be targeted better at those who cannot afford to pay.

The revised costs will bring the county more in to line with how things operate elsewhere in England. Currently the County charges the same flat rate all over Oxfordshire. In future it will charge what care costs to deliver in each local community, as this differs from place to place.

The changes will enable about £1.8m per year to be spent on social care for people with significant care needs and who are unable to pay for care themselves.

- The council provides Adult Social Care to 6800 clients.
- Of these, 4800 make a contribution towards the cost of their care and 2000 currently make no contribution.
- Of the 4800 who contribute, the council estimates that about 1700 people would see an increase in their contribution to the cost of their care. For the majority the increase would be no more than £30 per week.
- About 1300 would be better off (saving about £10 per week). Around 1800 would see no change at all.

### **Laundry service review**

The County's contract for the provision of the 'Care Wash' laundry service ends in September.

The number of people using the service has been reducing, mostly because many people are now supported with their laundry needs more independently, or in more flexible ways alongside other support they are receiving. There are also more options for laundry support in the market than when the contract first started.

A 'laundry review team' will work with everyone currently using the service, to understand their needs and identify the various options that work for them. Meanwhile, the 'Care Wash' service will continue to offer its service privately.

### **Nominate a nurse or midwife**

A new awards scheme allows patients and their families to nominate a nurse or midwife who has made a real difference through outstanding clinical care.

The DAISY Awards is a chance to say 'thank you' for the care that you will never forget. The awards recognise the achievements of nurses and midwives at the John Radcliffe, Churchill and Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre hospitals in Oxford, and the Horton Hospital in Banbury.

OUH Chief Nurse, Sam Foster said: "We're proud to be joining the thousands of renowned hospitals worldwide who participate in the DAISY programme who also celebrate the skillful

and compassionate care provided by individual nurses and midwives. Importantly, these awards fit well with our existing staff awards.”

The award scheme was created in the USA in 1999 by the family of J Patrick Barnes following his death from complications of the auto-immune disease ITP. The DAISY Foundation commemorates the appreciation Patrick’s family had for the nursing care and compassion shown to him and his family. Following Patrick’s death, they felt compelled to thank the nurses in a very public way by establishing the Foundation.

Each DAISY award recipient will be recognised at a surprise ceremony, typically in her or his ward or department. They will receive a DAISY award pin, certificate, a hand-carved sculpture and an invitation to the OUH Staff Achievement Awards Ceremony. There are 24 awards a year, three for midwives and 21 for nurses.

The nomination form is here:

<https://www.ouh.nhs.uk/working-for-us/nursing-midwifery/daisy-awards/documents/OUHDAISYtr-foldnominationform28318.pdf>

Further details are here:

<https://www.ouh.nhs.uk/working-for-us/nursing-midwifery/daisy-awards/default.aspx>

## **Unitary update**

The new Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government, James Brokenshire, has given a clear steer on local government reorganisation by saying “there is a clear space and scope for unitary authorities”.

He said he wanted to engage with the local government sector on proposals for reorganisation.

OCC submitted a detailed proposal to the Government last spring for the county and district councils in Oxfordshire to be abolished and to be replaced by a single, county-wide unitary authority.

Such a measure would save a minimum of £20m per year, as well as improving public services and strengthening local democracy.

Nick Carter comments: *The previous Secretary of State, Sajid Javid, agreed a similar plan for an overhaul in Bucks, before he left the job. I hope Mr Brokenshire will now treat the Oxfordshire plan as a priority.*

*I oversaw the preparation of this plan as part of my responsibilities as a member of the County Cabinet. I am convinced it is the logical and sensible solution to make local government and public services fit for the future, as well as saving a huge amount of money which can be re-invested in improving public services.*

## **Permitted Development Rights**

A report by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors has raised concerns over the use of Permitted Development Rights.

PD Rights allow commercial buildings to be converted into homes without full planning permission, and the RICS research, which focused on five local authority areas with high rates of permitted development schemes, found that little or no family housing was being provided in the conversions, while many of the resulting homes fail to meet national space standards.

The report also warned that councils were losing out on millions of pounds in planning fees, and the loss of 1,667 affordable housing units.

*In Thame alone, since the introduction of PD Rights, the equivalent of about 900 jobs have been lost because the local planning authority is unable to prevent commercial premises being changed into residential use.*

## **IN BRIEF:**

### **Self-driving cars**

Driven, a consortium researching autonomous vehicles, has made its first public demonstration of its work with two cars driving autonomously at its headquarters at the RACE Building at the Culham Science Centre in Abingdon.

### **Safe cycle training**

The County offers all primary schools in Oxfordshire the opportunity to provide cycle training to pupils aged 9-11.

Children taking part in cycle training (National Standard level 1 & 2) learn about the rules of the road, right of way and how to make safer decisions in traffic. Almost 2,600 children benefit each year from these vital safety lessons, with a further 185 youngsters receiving similar training from the government grant scheme, Bikeability.

### **Better broadband**

Oxfordshire now has 96.5% superfast broadband coverage, increasingly enabling digital infrastructure in the most rural parts of the county.

Recent installations in the Thame & Chinnor area include a long-awaited cabinet at Howland Road Business Park.

Meanwhile, adoption of the newly available fibre broadband services is running at over 54%, which is well above national average.

### **New home registrations dip**

Almost 155,000 new homes were listed with the National House Building Council in the year up to April, marking a 2% fall on the previous year.

In the first quarter of 2018, there was a 14% drop nationwide compared with last year, but the overall figure is still the second highest amount in a decade.

### **Pioneering 'urban forests'**

Wycombe DC is to become the first planning authority in England to require that developers plant "urban forests" which provide tree cover over 25% of any new estates.

Research into social disadvantage shows this 25% level gives an area the aura of being a leafier prosperous neighbourhood.

Wycombe's scheme could be considered for inclusion in the National Planning Policy Framework to help fulfil Defra's 25-year environment plan to plant 11m more trees.

### **England short of 4m homes**

Research by Heriot-Watt University for the National Housing Federation and homelessness charity Crisis has estimated that England is short of around 4m homes, highlighting the scale of the current housing crisis.

National Housing Federation chief executive David Orr said the figures revealed the "epic scale of the housing crisis," and said an "urgent effort from the Government" was needed ahead of this summer's social housing green paper.

### **Fostering shortage**

The UK is short of more than 8,000 families willing to foster children, according to a leading charity. The Fostering Network says there is a particular need to find families who can take on siblings or teenagers.

### **Oxfordshire's available workforce**

The whole of Oxfordshire's current available workforce is just 2,700. The figure is calculated by adding Job Seekers and Universal Credit claimants together, which total 0.6 per cent of the county's working population, currently 450,000.

Speaking at a panel debate at the Oxfordshire Property Festival in May, the chief executive of OxLEP, Nigel Tipple, quoted the figure, adding that OxLEP had supported the creation of 40,000 jobs in the last five years.

### **Sydenham road closure**

A road closure at Sydenham will now start on 17 August to 28 September, following a delay of earlier plans for road works.

The closure affects Sydenham Road and Stert Road, whilst essential water main upgrading works are carried out.

Further information regarding the works may be obtained by contacting Crusader Traffic on 01406 490011.