

## County Councillors' Newsletter

March 2021

*from Nick Carter & Jeannette Matelot*

### **BUDGET PROTECTS FRONT-LINE SERVICES**

Frontline services are being given high levels of protection and new investment as part of OCC's budget for 2021/22. It includes a 1.99% rise in basic council tax, plus an extra 1% specifically for adult social care, making a total of 2.99%.

Last month's meeting of all 63 county councillors agreed the new budget, which strengthens the County's approach to climate action, its focus on inequalities, its youth services, and its COVID-19 recovery strategy.

A total of £19.6m of savings are being applied across all services, of which £14.6m were already planned and are centred on making services more efficient while protecting the frontline.

The County is also investing in services that will have positive long-term impact for local communities. The budget reflects this with more than £25m of additional funding to help meet additional demands, such as within adult social care.

### **NEW INVESTMENTS**

Each year as part of its budget process the County identifies any new pressures that need to be funded and new priorities. It needs to meet annual inflation costs and plan for the increase in demand for adult social care due to continued rises in life expectancy and long-term population growth. These investments will include:

- A total of £1m long-term funding to expand the youth offer in Oxfordshire. A study is due to report later in the Spring on the needs of young people and how the wider partnership of the voluntary, community and public services can best provide support. An additional £500,000 of one-off accelerator funding will also develop sustainable long-term approaches and help tackle the impacts of the pandemic on young people.
- An extra £4m is added to the adult social care budget for 2021/22, which includes £1.35m for managing risks such as the sustainability of providers.
- The Better Care Fund (BCF) is a programme spanning both the County Council and NHS. It seeks to join up health and care services so that people can manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. Last year, the County agreed with its health partners that £1.2m of the improved BCF for Oxfordshire would be used, as one-off funding, to support activities over the winter period. Now the funding will be continued for 2021/22, and used on measures to help people be discharged from hospital.
- The number of adults of working age with physical disabilities has increased, and there are forecast overspends for both care at home and for residential care. While this has been managed within pooled resources between the County and NHS during 2020/21, it cannot be maintained in the longer run. Pending a review of the needs and activity for these service users, £750,000 will be added to the expenditure on assessed care needs from 2021/22.
- OCC is part of a joint partnership to procure and manage services for single homeless people in Oxfordshire. A further £250,000 contribution to the partnership has been allocated for 2021/22, and the County is proposing to continue its support for the partnership from 2022/23.
- During the pandemic, more people have chosen to take up drugs and alcohol residential rehabilitation services, and this has led to an increase of £50,000 for the existing services.
- An extra £400,000 will be spent on highway maintenance, focused on vegetation and drainage clearance, and also to support a trial project enabling parish councils to implement 20mph schemes in their villages.
- A £300,000 fund will support innovative community-developed projects and activities that improve people's health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire. Of this, £150,000 is new funding and £150,000 comes from existing public health budgets.

- An extra £330,000 will be invested into children's services on increasing early intervention, improving the skills of children's social workers and special educational needs services.
- A total of £100,000 will be invested in issues linked to digital exclusion, a further £81,000 in domestic violence services and £150,000 in apprenticeships.

## **PROPOSED SAVINGS**

- OCC will carry out checks to make sure companies who have been granted permits to carry out roadworks finish on time. This will mean that late finishers could be fined up to £10,000 per day, and these penalties are likely to generate £225,000 in 2021/22.
- For adults with care support needs, the County intends to maximise the use of existing contracted capacity and look at creative ways to meet needs at a lower cost. This will be done while helping residents to live as independently as possible. It is anticipated that it will be possible to save £1m (around 1% of the total budget) in each of the adults with care and support needs and Better Care Fund pooled budgets in 2021/22.
- A £430,000 increase was planned in the waste management budget in 2021/22 due to the forecast rise in the number of homes in Oxfordshire. It was expected this would lead to more waste. However, new homes have not been built at the predicted pace and this investment can now be deferred beyond 2021/22.
- A set of projects are underway to focus on outcomes for children whom the County cares for, in order to meet their needs through local placements, particularly children with complex needs. One of these projects is looking at providing the right type of foster placements for children, and another is looking at the provision of small residential homes (two to three beds). The aim is to be able to provide the placements within Oxfordshire wherever possible, which will save £1.02m.
- Funding was originally allocated for growth in demand for school transport, based on new-build housing. However, housing has not been developed as quickly as anticipated, and so the County will save £700,000 in 2021/22.
- The County will benefit from £1.66m of savings through retendering its insurance contract, based on an analysis of amounts that have been required in recent years.
- The County estimates it will save £750,000 on staff travel budgets and £100,000 on printing, although this will be closely monitored throughout the year.
- The County's property team will save £1.95m in 2021/22 rising to £3.3m in 2022/23. The focus in 2021/22 will be on joint working with Cherwell District Council to blend the two property teams and find more efficient ways of working.

OCC's annual net budget in 2020/21 was £474.6m, and in 2021/22 it is forecast to be £485m.

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## **EXPERIENCE PAYS OFF IN FUNDING BID**

Dogged determination paid off when Jeannette Matelot successfully negotiated a major injection of funding for a number of road improvements in the Thame & Chinnor area.

The 'community infrastructure levy' (CIL) enables developers to contribute to county-wide infrastructure schemes which offset the impact of new housing. One of the pressures arising from development is of course on our roads, and so CIL contributions go into a central fund which is collected by the district councils on the County's behalf.

Parish councils are entitled to bid for up to 25% of the CIL fund for their own local projects, and the Clinical Commissioning Groups take 10% of the pot. The remaining 65% is then divided between the County and the relevant district council.

Jeannette made five applications to the CIL fund and was successful in getting the full amount she applied for – a total of £255,000.

This consists of: £70,000 for a pedestrian crossing in Wellington Street, Thame; £100k for a traffic calming scheme in Mill Lane, Chinnor, and £25k for traffic calming in Kingston Blount; £20k for VAS electronic traffic signs in Sydenham; and £40k to widen a footway in Towersey.

The funds were expected to be transferred from SODC to the County at the beginning of the year, but we have now been informed that the transfer will be in mid-March. Nonetheless, OCC has already begun the planning work and preparations for the relevant consultations.

## SLIGHT FALL IN COVID INFECTION RATES

The latest available figures for Covid infections are for the week ending 19th February, when there were 531 new confirmed cases in Oxfordshire, a 5% reduction on the previous week's total of 561. The figures for the five districts are summarised in the table below.

Area name	Cases in 7 days up to 12/02	Rate per 100,000 population	Cases in 7 days up to 19/02	Rate per 100,000 population
Cherwell	124	82.4	155	103.0
Oxford	162	106.3	157	103.0
South Oxfordshire	117	82.4	88	61.9
Vale of White Horse	91	66.9	84	61.8
West Oxfordshire	67	60.6	47	42.5
<b>Oxfordshire</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>531</b>	<b>76.8</b>

There is a [COVID-19 dashboard](#) on OCC's website which provides daily COVID-19 statistics. It shows daily new cases, total cases to date, weekly rate of confirmed cases per 100,000 population, daily assessments of reported symptoms, and a breakdown of the five districts.

Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) individuals, including those already shielding and those recently added to the list by the Government, should continue to shield until 31st March. All CEV people are advised to stay at home as much as possible, except for exercise or health appointments, and they are advised to work from home.

Working closely with the community and voluntary sector, all six councils in Oxfordshire have in place a framework to support CEV individuals and are contacting those new to the list to outline the support available.

County councillors will attend a 90-minute COVID-19 briefing on 8th March to ensure they are aware of the County's current position and any emerging issues in Oxfordshire.

## LOCAL VACCINATION PROGRESS

The local vaccination programme is continuing at a phenomenal pace, and more than 150,000 people living or working in Oxfordshire have now received their first jab, including all frontline health and social care staff and all older adult care home residents and staff. More than 95% of those aged over 75 have had their first vaccination, and more than 90% of those aged 70-74.

In early March, the six councils began a new outreach service to support the uptake of vaccinations, in partnership with GPs and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

The operation aims to contact residents in the top four priority groups who have not responded to their invitation for a first dose of the vaccine. There are a range of reasons why people may not have arranged a vaccination – from difficulties in booking an appointment or arranging transport, to hesitancy or misunderstandings about the vaccine.

Outreach workers are calling at the addresses of people who have not responded to repeated contact attempts from their GP. They will help with booking an appointment and arranging transport, or will simply offer information and advice.

The outreach workers have already been visiting residents who are shielding or self-isolating throughout the pandemic and so are highly experienced. They will be dressed in clearly identifiable clothing, carry an ID, and follow social distancing guidelines.

The residents' contact details are being provided by GP practices. A new list will be sent every two weeks to the council teams, who will then inform GP practices about the outcomes of visits. This information will help build up a detailed picture of why people may be not taking up the opportunity of vaccination.

## TESTING FOR SYMPTOMS

Testing continues for people who have COVID-19 symptoms, and the latest dates for these at Chinnor Rugby Club are on March 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26. [Booking](#) is required.

Meanwhile, symptom-free testing has been expanded to cover public-facing workers and volunteers.

Free rapid testing is now available to anyone without COVID-19 symptoms who needs to leave home to work or volunteer and who does not have access to workplace testing through their employer. This includes the self-employed and people who work for small businesses, such as taxi drivers, independent retailers, and tradespeople such as plumbers and electricians.

OCC's symptom-free testing programme, which is being run in partnership with the five district councils, initially focused on those not already included in the national testing scheme, starting with the police and fire service. This was then expanded to include early years' staff and childminders, and now public-facing workers and volunteers are invited to get tested on a weekly basis.

Around one in three people with COVID-19 have no symptoms, and so regular testing of public-facing workers will help to stop the spread of the virus by identifying those who are unaware they are infected. The rapid spread of new variants makes testing for those who work outside the home an even greater priority.

Those who have to leave home to work or volunteer can [book a test](#) via OCC's website. The test takes 15 minutes, and results are given within an hour by text message or by email. Anyone who tests positive is told to self-isolate and follow the national guidance. They are provided with [advice and sources of support on self-isolation](#).

Symptom-free testing is aimed at those who cannot work from home. People should continue to work from home where possible, and those who can work from home do not need to be tested.

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## CENSUS HELP NEEDED

Letters will arrive on everyone's doormats in early March, reminding residents of the Census 2021 on Sunday 21st March.

The County's social media messages are reinforcing the message that completing the Census return will help shape our community for the next 10 years. For the first time, the new Census will be digital first, and all households will receive a unique access code, allowing them to complete the questionnaire on computers or phones.

This could be challenging for some residents, and the local Census team needs to understand which communities and groups may need support. Town and parish councillors will have received a survey to help gather this information, and the County would appreciate any local knowledge to help the team identify where an extra focus is needed.

There is a [handbook](#) for councillors, and any questions about the Census in South Oxfordshire should be directed at Sinead Leach at [sinead.leach49@field.Census.gov.uk](mailto:sinead.leach49@field.Census.gov.uk) or 07452 948074.

Further information is also available at [www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk)

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## HOME FIRST FOR A HAPPIER LIFE

More people in Oxfordshire are able to live happier and more independent lives following a stay in hospital thanks to a service known as "Home First".

Home First is a collaboration involving local health and social care providers and Age UK Oxfordshire and aims to help people to regain their independence and return home following an illness or injury that required a hospital stay.

The innovative approach has meant that people become more able more quickly and are less reliant on care services. In the last part of 2020 the care hours needed by this group of people reduced by over half.

Home First is a joint initiative between OCC, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, and Age UK Oxfordshire, who work holistically using a strength-based approach maximising people's ability to live independently in their own home.

A team of therapists, social workers, coordinators, reablement workers, and support workers collaborate to carry out assessments, then a seamless and comfortable return to the home environment. For someone over the age of 80, just 10 days in hospital can lead to 10 years' worth of aging in the muscles.

Sam Foster, Chief Nursing Officer at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, comments: "This collaborative approach is an essential part of making sure our patients receive the right care, in the right place.

"Once hospital care is complete, many people want to be back home as soon as possible, which is completely understandable. Being in hospital for longer than needed often leads to a deterioration in people's general condition, and can even increase their long-term care needs.

"This home first approach not only makes sure people are confident and happy in their own homes, it also means that there is capacity in our hospitals for people who need to have more acute care."

Meanwhile, the pandemic has increased the opportunity for agile working and using assisted technology. Teams are using smart phones to order equipment quickly and efficiently. Whatsapp video calls are used to speak to movement and handling specialists so assessments can be observed, and recommendations can be made safely.

The County plans to commission more domiciliary care providers and agencies to broaden support for vulnerable people recovering from coronavirus while providing full PPE and training.

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## **NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR HIGHWAY TEAMS**

A project which has brought in an extra £400,000 a year, increased public satisfaction with highway maintenance and helped residents highlight which roads need fixing, was shortlisted for a national award.

The County made the final six in the Association for Public Sector Excellence (APSE) Annual Service Awards 2020 for its work to reform its highways service. It was shortlisted in the Best Innovation or Demand Management Initiative category.

The highway service conducted a full review of how it operated, including how it communicated with the public, the way it worked with its contractors, and how efficient it was. This resulted in a programme of improvements put in place to create a better highways service for Oxfordshire.

The improvements include:

- Increasing income by £400,000 per annum, reducing the burden on council taxpayers.
- Utilising funding more efficiently, increasing the money available to deliver services.
- Better engagement with town and parish councils, producing better information to help them deal with highways issues locally.
- Creating a network of local volunteer 'super-users' as part of the Fix My Street initiative who help report issues to the highways teams for fixing.
- A better approach to business planning that has improved the relationships with contractors and provided more robust measurement of performance.
- More and better communication with the public, with more information available about the work the highways teams are doing, using channels such as Twitter and Facebook.
- An increase in customer satisfaction with highway maintenance by nine per cent (National Highways & Transport Survey data).

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## **CONSULTATION ON TRANSPORT BLUEPRINT**

Local residents and organisations have a chance to help shape the transformation of transport and digital connectivity across Oxfordshire in a consultation which runs until 28th March.

At the centre of OCC's thinking are the need for climate action, helping to create healthy communities and improving air quality. Its new local transport & connectivity plan (LTCP) sets out its vision for a zero-carbon economy and to transform the health and wellbeing of residents.

Any transport plan must address travel in a way that reduces congestion, improves health and helps to develop active, connected communities. The LTCP blueprint is the first step in this direction, setting out the overarching policy direction and ambition for transport schemes in the county.

This consultation offers residents a chance to give feedback on the content of the plan, which has so far been developed from analysis of engagement work with many organisations and of transport data and evidence from a survey in March 2020.

The areas of focus for the new plan are:

- Commitments to de-carbonise the transport system by 2050
- Reducing the need to travel
- Discouraging unnecessary individual private vehicle use by promoting use of public transport and active travel such as walking and cycling
- A push towards quality digital gigabit and/or full fibre connectivity for all
- Enabling the economy to develop, supporting the Oxfordshire local industrial strategy agreed in July 2019
- Public transport operations and network changes amid the impacts of COVID-19.

By focusing on these areas, the LTCP aims to protect Oxfordshire's natural and historic environment as well as improving resident's health and wellbeing, social inclusivity and access to education. A second consultation later this year will update and further develop the full LTCP.

Residents can have their say by visiting the [county council's consultation site](http://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation-ltcp/) and the URL is: <http://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation-ltcp/>

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## **NEW NETWORK WILL CHAMPION THE CLIMATE CAUSE**

OCC's plans to turn Oxfordshire into a zero-carbon county by 2050 are set to benefit from a new link-up with business network Oxfordshire Greentech (OG), which will champion the cause of sustainable and low-carbon business.

Bicester-based OG has more than 100 members, enabling the County Council to collaborate with businesses who are driving the zero-carbon transition in Oxfordshire. The OG business network was set up in 2019 to bring together a wide range of commercial interests, academia and other organisations to encourage innovation, collaboration and knowledge transfer as a response to the climate emergency.

The County's partnership with OG will build on its commitment to seeing Oxfordshire as a 'Living Lab' for low-carbon solutions. OCC's iHub already develops partnerships with businesses and academia to help find solutions that benefit residents and the economy. Alongside transport innovations such as the park and charge initiative for electric vehicles, The County intends to develop new collaborations with businesses.

The network is not just relevant to tech companies; a wide range of organisations play an active role such as funders, architects, support services, and interior designers. This creates a 'green ecosystem' providing everything organisations need to make a sustainable business flourish.

Members benefit from market intelligence, connecting with suppliers, customers and support organisations, and can get help to make their own operations more sustainable. OG provides regular updates, events and networking, pitching and 'Meet the Buyer' opportunities.

OG itself is a collaboration between sustainability charity Bioregional and sister network Cambridge Cleantech. Members have affiliate membership of the sister network, opening up a wider array of events and connections.

As part of OCC's partnership with Oxfordshire Greentech, any company in Oxfordshire wishing to join the network can get 10% off basic membership until January 2022.

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## **GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR THE OX-CAM ARC**

The Government announced last month that it plans to transform the Oxford-Cambridge Arc into the UK's fastest-growing economic region.

The Arc area encompasses Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, and comprises the five counties of Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire. It supports over two million jobs, adds over £110 billion to the economy every year, and houses one of the fastest-growing economies in England.

The Government aims to focus on the area's economic, social and environmental future, and its analysis suggests that by 2050 economic output could double to over £200bn. It intends to work with local partners to:

- Develop a 'spatial framework' for the Arc – which is a long-term regional plan to coordinate infrastructure and new developments in the area. It says this will give communities a chance to shape the long-term future of their area and will help ensure the benefits of growth are felt across the region.
- Explore the creation of an Arc Growth Body – which would provide clear economic leadership for the area, championing its talent and assets internationally, supporting businesses, and fostering innovation.

For further information, [read the announcement](#) on [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)

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## **RECRUITING ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS**

People living close to Oxfordshire's fire stations, such as the one in Thame, are being encouraged to become paid on-call firefighters as part of a new recruitment campaign in March.

The County is recruiting local firefighters who participate in a wide range of activities in the local area, from responding to emergency calls to supporting safety needs and providing prevention advice.

There are currently 390 on-call firefighters in Oxfordshire, all of whom are everyday people with normal jobs and hobbies. On top of this, they make themselves available at certain times to respond to emergency calls either from their home, their work or their community.

Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service provides all the training to develop a broad range of transferable work and life skills, and it offers a flexible work pattern to fit around individuals' studies, work and family commitments.

On-call firefighters should live or work within a close distance to the local fire station (approximately five minutes). They should have a strong desire to support the local community, an enthusiasm for working as part of a team, and a reasonable level of fitness.

Anyone interested can visit [www.oncallfire.uk](http://www.oncallfire.uk) and residents wanting more information or to apply can email [fire.recruitment@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:fire.recruitment@oxfordshire.gov.uk) using the subject title on-call week enquiry.

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## **FIRST CHOICE FOR MOST PUPILS**

Nearly all parents and children in Oxfordshire have been offered their first choice of secondary school for the next academic year.

A total of 89.99% (6,371) of applications have been awarded their first choice. A total of 97.27% (6,909) have been offered one of the four choices they listed on their application.

The successful first choices represent a slight improvement on last year's figures in Oxfordshire, and the result is comfortably ahead of the national average which, last year, was 80.9%. The County's aim is to give every child a good start in life, and its school admissions team consistently plays a part in that.

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## **HIV TESTING IS EASIER THAN EVER**

Oxfordshire residents are being reminded that HIV testing is now easier than ever for anybody to access.

People can now get tested by ordering a home testing kit with results being sent by text. The tests can be ordered by going to the [Free Testing website](#).

During last month's 'national HIV testing week', 825 HIV tests were delivered to Oxfordshire residents alone – more than treble the usual amount. More than 100,000 people live with HIV in the UK, and 497 of these are in Oxfordshire. People still face ignorance and discrimination that can limit their opportunities.

The County's public health officers say that although the HIV epidemic is slowing in the UK, nearly half of people who test positive are finding out they have HIV very late, meaning the virus may have damaged their health permanently. Between 2017 and 2019, out of 32 people aged 15 and over who tested positive for HIV

in Oxfordshire, a total of 11 were diagnosed late. By catching the virus early and with the right treatment, most people with HIV can now live very full, long and happy lives.

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### **ANOTHER A40 CLOSURE**

After a section of the A40 at Tetsworth was closed for major repairs lasting several weeks last year, another section of the A40 is now due for closure next month.

There will be a temporary closure in Tetsworth at the junction with Stoke Talmage Road A329 next month to allow for carriageway patching works. The closure will operate from 20th April to 23rd April.

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*Newsletter by Nick Carter and Jeannette Matelot*

*County Councillors for Thame & Chinnor*

*(the County's Thame & Chinnor division includes the villages of Aston Rowant, Crowell, Henton, Kingston Blount, Moreton, Sydenham, Tetsworth and Towersey).*