

# Oxfordshire County Council Annual Parish Report

**2015/2016****A summary of key events during the past year**

## **1. THE YEAR OF A THOUSAND CUTS**

The austerity drive from central government has made itself felt this past year with counties facing severe reductions in local government grants whilst being hamstrung from increasing their own taxes to counteract this. Oxfordshire has been no exception and each monthly report-back has added more and more bad news. The drivers behind these cuts can be summarised as follows:

- This is now our **sixth straight financial year** of having to make savings (since 2010/11).
- We are already in the process of saving £290m from 2010 to 2018.
- We will have to make significant savings on top of that from 2016-2020 as a result of a new round of cuts from Central Government.
- We currently spend around 50 per cent of our budget on children's and adults social care (2 per cent of the population). We believe that by 2020 this will be 75 per cent.
- We've cut our senior management by more than 40 per cent. We are sharing finance/HR services with Hampshire. The quick win savings have been made.

## **2. SUBSIDISED TRANSPORT**

Following lengthy consultation and debate it was decided there was no alternative to cutting subsidies for bus services. This will have a marked effect on rural areas especially, and no doubt the future will hold many unintended consequences, yet to be revealed. Subsidies will cease at the end of the current school year on 20 July 2016. The bus service providers are co-operating with local parish councils in trying to draw up alternative timetables to provide at least a skeleton service following this.

## **3. CHILDREN'S CENTRES**

- Savings are required as a result of government funding reductions and the need to respond to the rising demand for children's social care services
- The new service for 0-19 year olds (25 where child has special educational needs) and their families will provide a co-ordinated service that targets resources on protecting the most vulnerable families and works hand in hand with schools and settings, health partners, Thames Valley Police and voluntary sector partners
- The County Council is working with local communities to support the continuation of open access sessions such as stay and play and youth group sessions where the council can no longer provide funding for these services

### **a. Background on recent council budget decisions**

A series of decisions has been made recently by the council regarding children's services.

- A £6m saving agreed in 2014/15 on early intervention hubs and children's centres will still have to be implemented.
- Consultation on the new model included an additional potential saving of £2m increasing the total saving required to £8m overall.
- On 16 February the council agreed new budget arrangements for Oxfordshire. This included an agreement that £2m of savings relating to early intervention hubs and children's centres will not, after all, be required.
- No decisions have been made yet on how this £2m will be spent.
- On 23 February the council approved the proposals for new arrangements for an integrated children's social care and early intervention service to support children and families in Oxfordshire.

### **b. Eight Children and Family Centres**

- The new service includes creating eight Children and Family Centres across Oxfordshire working with children and families aged 0-19 (25 where child has special educational needs) utilising existing buildings.
- The eight Children and Family Centres will support children and their families who need help and will integrate the current work of the children's centres, the early intervention hubs and children's social care.
- The centres will provide targeted support to prevent needs escalating and open access sessions will be available.
- An outreach service will be provided to all parts of Oxfordshire which will help those families who most need intensive support.
- Under the new service structure the Locality and Community Support Service will become the first point of contact for professionals who have concerns about a child, except where there are immediate safeguarding concerns.
- Timings for the start date of the new service will be finalised following a staff consultation.

Early indications of the buildings we think will be retained for the new service are listed here - however this may change based on capacity and as other suggestions are put forward.

- Banbury Early Intervention Hub
- Bicester Early Intervention Hub
- West Oxfordshire Early Intervention Hub
- The Roundabout Centre, Barton
- Rose Hill and Littlemore Children's Centre
- Blackbird Leys Children's Centre
- Abingdon Early Intervention Hub
- Didcot Early Intervention Hub

In addition to the eight centres above, support will be provided to a further 11 centres that provide childcare on site - these are:

- East Street Centre, Calder Close, Banbury
- Sunshine Centre, Edmunds Road, Banbury
- North Banbury Centre, Hardwick School, Banbury

- Britannia Road Centre, Grove Street, Banbury
- The Ace Centre, Burford Road, Chipping Norton
- Slade Children's Centre, Titup Hall Drive, Oxford
- East Oxford Children's Centre, Collins Street, Oxford
- Grandpont Children's Centre, Whitehouse Road, Oxford
- Rosehill Littlemore Children's Centre, Ashurst Way, Rose Hill
- Elms Road Children's Centre, Elms Road, Botley
- Stephen Freeman Centre, Freeman Road, Didcot

It is proposed to continue supporting these child care settings until April 2017 with a view to them being financially self-sufficient to deliver child care from April 2017. Supporting these settings will provide a base for the council's outreach work that will be delivered in those communities. The council will also work with these settings and communities to support the delivery of some open access sessions from these buildings

As well as the eight Children and Family Centres, a mobile bus service will deliver services to rural communities and the traveller community.

#### **c. Communities Initiative**

- We are keen to work with communities to see that, wherever possible, open access sessions such as stay and play and youth group sessions continue without council funding.
- Communities are invited under the council's Oxfordshire Together programme, to put forward proposals to run open access sessions.
- Proposals can be put forward to run a range of services as long as they include some children's services.
- Email [localities@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:localities@oxfordshire.gov.uk) for more information or to start discussions on proposals.

#### **4. HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES (HWRCs)**

A proposal was put forward to reduce the number of HWRCs as part of our cost saving efforts. This met with considerable antipathy following a public consultation. Finally some good news emerged when it was announced late in 2015 that these centres would remain open for the foreseeable future. The Leader of the Council has written to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government asking for a change in the rules which prevent local councils from charging for the use of HWRCs, as this would enable us to more than cover the cost of maintaining the service.

#### **5. OXFORDSHIRE TOGETHER - COMMUNITY LED SERVICES**

The continuing financial pressure on local government means Oxfordshire County Council still has to save more money. We have already announced savings that will have a big impact on local communities, such as children's centres and subsidised transport. Over time, we hope more responsibilities will be taken on by communities. People know what is important for their area, and local communities are often able to provide services themselves. So although there is no point pretending that there is no financial motive for thinking about services could be run by local communities, there are real opportunities.

Oxfordshire County Council is looking at alternative ways in which we can deliver a number of different public services, across a wide range of areas. We have already been working with local communities in a number of areas to deliver services such as grass cutting, youth provision and libraries. Enabling local communities to deliver services has meant that they can shape, design and tailor the services to meet their local needs.

This proposal highlights the potential for the county council to work more closely with all town and parish councils, and seeks to identify further opportunities to enable us to reshape the way that public services are delivered in the future. There is an assumption that 'one size does not fit all' and therefore there will be a differentiated approach in each community.

Work is continuing in identifying which services will be taken on by which parishes and this will be implemented during the current year. View or download the communities' initiative framework, access FAQs and other information on [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether)

## **6. PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY COUNCIL**

On Thursday 25th February a surprise announcement was made by Oxfordshire's District Councils and Oxford City Council. It called for the abolition of the County Council and the establishment of four district quasi-unitary councils, to include parts of Gloucestershire and Northamptonshire. (A unitary council combines the functions of a county council and a district council into one body.) In addition, the announcement called for the creation of an unelected quango to be known as a 'Combined Authority' to take on difficult areas of responsibility currently with the County Council, such as social care and major road projects. So, this would mean four councils spread across three counties, plus an over-arching unelected quango.

The Districts have commissioned management consultants to produce a report to evaluate their proposals. Initially their brief to consultants stated: "The District Councils' view is that a single county-wide unitary authority is not the right solution for Oxfordshire". It went on to say that any finding suggesting a single county-wide unitary is best would not be approved.

The Oxfordshire County Council view was that a single county-wide unitary authority was an option that should be considered (along with the Districts' proposal and other options for two or three unitary councils), and had thus been forced to begin the process of commissioning a separate management consultant's report.

As a result of County and public pressure, District Council leaders have now agreed to commission a report covering all the options, although it still states that the objective is "to test the proposal for four Unitary Councils with a Combined Authority" and suggests that two alternative proposals for a dual- and single-unitary authority be used as a benchmark, rather than as real, viable options. It would appear that council-tax payers might now have to fund two separate reports, in order to obtain an open-minded, unbiased and transparent view of all the options open to the residents of the county.

## MOTIONS TABLED BY YOUR COUNCILLOR

During this past year I have tabled two motions to full Council on your behalf. The first was to ask for the ability to charge for the use of HWRCs, which received good support and resulted in a letter from the Leader to the Secretary of State, as mentioned earlier. The second dealt with issue of sportive cycling events and the dangers caused to rural communities, calling on the Council to instruct its officers to draw up regulations to be applied to all sportive and triathlon events, or any event of a similar nature where participants are timed, in order to provide a greater degree of safety to our residents. Unfortunately this did not gain the support of officers, who are limited on what regulatory proposals they can include, as all cyclists have the right to use the roads and the nature of Sportives means they do not need traffic management, and so officers often can be unsighted to such events. They are therefore working with the local cycle clubs to see how we can encourage use of routes that are most suited to such events.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Kind regards

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