

# Oxfordshire County Council Annual Parish Report

**2016/2017**

A summary of key events during the past year

## **1. PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY COUNCIL**

Following a year of negotiation, proposals, counter proposals and deadlock, the County eventually persuaded South and Vale Districts to join in the proposal for a single unitary council for Oxfordshire. This has now been submitted to the DCLG for consideration by the Secretary of State and has very recently received the support of local MP, John Howell. There had been hope of an early indication of support or otherwise from DCLG but the snap General Election has probably put the kibosh on that.

## **2. CHILDREN'S CENTRES**

Of the 44 Children's Centres from which we had to withdraw funding, 33 have successfully converted to self-funding models in various shapes and sizes and we continue to advise the remaining centres on how to move forward in the best interests of children and families in the county.

## **3. DAY CENTRES**

Elderly residents who make use of Day Centres in the county will continue to receive support from the Council while they also transition to new and sustainable funding models. The Council will go out of its way to ensure that vulnerable residents in the county receive the services they deserve.

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

HWRCs in the county will continue to operate as usual despite the threat of cuts to funding and the Council will continue to lobby central government for permission to charge (modestly!) for these services in order to ensure their sustainability

## **5. PLANS TO TRANSFORM ADOPTION SERVICES ACROSS THAMES VALLEY**

OCC is joining forces with neighbouring councils to create a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) for the Thames Valley. The agency will improve outcomes for both children and adopters – including the ability to match children with families more quickly and improve support services for adopters. Oxfordshire will be the host authority within a partnership known as 'Adopt Thames Valley', alongside six other councils (Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham, Swindon and Reading) and two Voluntary Adoption Agencies (PACT and Barnardo's).

## **6. SCHOOLS**

Solid forward planning has once again ensured the overwhelming majority of Oxfordshire children have been offered a place at their first-choice primary school. The proportion of children receiving a first-preference offer rose to 93.68 per cent this year, from 91.51 per cent in 2016 and 88.04 per cent in 2015. A further 4.55 per cent of children were offered their second-choice school.

Although there were fewer applications this year (7,312 compared with 7,600 in 2016), it means just 78 children have been offered a place at a school not listed on their application, compared with 148 in 2016 and 320 in 2015.

The council is on course to have created nearly 3,000 additional primary school places between 2015 and 2018. Recent national figures also show the proportion of pupils in Good or Outstanding primary schools in Oxfordshire rose from 59% in 2012 to 85% in 2015 – in real terms, an increase of 14,600 children.

## **7. EXTRA FUNDING SECURED IN ADDITION TO 2017/18 BUDGET PROPOSALS**

The County Council set its budget for 2017/18 on Tuesday 14th February. Ahead of the meeting, it was announced the Council had £1,957,000 extra, as a result of better than expected business rate collections, council tax collection fund surpluses and a higher than expected grant. The County is proposing to hold £926,000 of this until the 2018/19 financial year, and to spend the rest of the money (£1.03m) in this financial year in the following ways:

- £170,000 to be spent on additional grass-cutting work on highway verges. This is an area of spend that has been reduced in recent years.
- £250,000 one-off funding initially for a pilot Communities Fund for parishes and towns to bid for matched funding schemes following changes/reductions for funding for services.
- £600,000 additional funding for children's social care – a part of the council that has been exempted from cuts since 2010 but has continued to experience significant rising demand on services in common with children's social care departments across England.
- £11,000 increase on the Council's Flood Defence Levy.

## **8. ELECTION 2017**

No overall majority has been achieved. The Conservative group, with 31 of 63 seats, will be seeking an alliance with independent members to achieve a voting majority.

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

Kind regards



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