

Councillor Briefing



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

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1. ‘Growth dividend’ could bring a £120m boost for roads and public buildings

A proposal to invest an extra £120m on roads and property repairs has been approved by the county council's Cabinet.

The [Cabinet report](#) outlines an opportunity to improve and invest in the Oxfordshire's roads, pavements, bridges and county council maintained buildings, especially schools. The borrowing would be funded from a potential £6m-a-year increase in council tax income as the result of expected growth in homes in Oxfordshire.

The Cabinet agreed in principle to borrow up to £120m, with detailed business cases produced for each proposed project funded from the investment pot. The Cabinet report references research that shows that the condition of the highway network influences where small and medium size businesses choose to locate. It also points out that an improved road condition would make Oxfordshire more competitive and increase economic growth.

Around £80m would be spent on highway improvements, with the remainder invested in other county council-owned assets especially schools.

2. Cabinet approves new operating model to make the council ‘fit for the future’

Oxfordshire County Council will get a complete overhaul to ensure it is ‘fit for the future’ and continues to meet rising demand for services. The changes are crucial to enabling the county council to deliver its vision of ‘thriving communities for everyone’.

The Cabinet has accepted the [business case for a new ‘operating model’](#) and will consider how it will be implemented next month.

The transformation plan would protect and improve frontline services for residents, while cutting red tape and reducing the costs of ‘back office’ administration. The proposed redesign of the county council could save between £34m-58m a year and ensure a continued balanced budget, with the possibility of reinvesting in services in the future.

The detailed business case for implementing the new operating model currently estimates a potential reduction of approximately 600-890 full time equivalent posts at the council over a two to three-year period. The council's annual staff turnover is about 650 posts so the number of compulsory redundancies is likely to be much fewer.

Customer service, supported by new technology, would be at the heart of the proposed new ‘operating model’ to make the council much more efficient. Residents contacting the council would see improved customer service with use of digital technology freeing up time for specialist staff to provide personalised services where needed.

3. Improvements for delayed transfer of care from hospital

Our latest snapshot of delayed transfer of care figures on September 13 showed there were 79 delayed patients in Oxfordshire - a 31% fall on the same period last year. The previous week there were 77 representing a sustained and significant fall from 2017 when the highest local recorded weekly figure was 202.

Based on the latest NHS published data, Oxfordshire is the 11th most improved system in the country, with a reduction of 58% in the number of bed days lost – more than twice the national average of 25%. This turnaround is attributed to a revitalised joined-up approach between NHS teams and the County Council ensuring that patients leave hospital as soon as they are medically fit to do so.

4. CQC returns to Oxfordshire for follow-up inspection of health and social care system

The Care Quality Commission is returning to review Oxfordshire's Health and Social Care system on November 5. This is one of only three planned follow-up reviews in England. The CQC is keen to understand our improvement journey and see the impact their recommendations have made on how we work together to support adults in Oxfordshire.

The System Review last year identified our dedicated staff delivering person centred care to people, but it highlighted a need to improve vision, strategies and engagement system leadership at senior levels of health and care organisations.

CQC's return is ahead of the expected timeframe (originally planned for 18 months after the original review) and is an opportunity for Oxfordshire to showcase the progress we've made over the last year, demonstrating improved outcomes for people as reflected by our success with reducing length of stays in hospital.

5. Councils join up to produce a spatial plan for Oxfordshire up to 2050

Oxfordshire's councils are working jointly on a countywide strategic plan which integrates planning for growth and infrastructure, with a focus on quality of life and health and wellbeing. The county council's Cabinet approved a [scoping document for the creation of the joint strategic spatial plan \(JSSP\)](#), which will be considered by the districts and city council in the coming weeks.

The JSSP will address the strategic and cumulative implications of growth and set out a long-term framework covering the whole of Oxfordshire up to 2050. It will be a genuinely strategic plan, which will set out future housing requirements and identify strategic locations or broad areas for future growth.

The JSSP will not allocate specific sites for development (any such decision to do this would require the explicit agreement of all the local authorities). Detailed local policies will be covered by future Local Plan reviews as necessary.

The county council's role as highways and education authority, and as a provider of many essential services to the communities and businesses makes it particularly relevant as a key player in the JSSP preparation process. Sustainable transport that create places where people can walk and cycle will underpin the JSSP, and it will apply learning from the county's healthy town initiatives in Barton and Bicester.

The six Oxfordshire Councils and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OXLEP) under the Oxfordshire Growth Board agreed the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal with Government in March 2018.

Under the terms of the Deal the local authorities have committed to producing an Oxfordshire Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (JSSP) for submission to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination by 31 March 2020 and adoption by 31 March 2021, subject to the examination process.

Early stakeholder engagement starts this Autumn and a public consultation is due in 2019 first on preferred options and then a proposed draft of the joint plan.

6. Councillors recommend improvements to monitoring of home education

The county council's Education Scrutiny committee recently investigated the reasons for an increase in elective home education (EHE) across the county. Although still a very small percentage of overall numbers, there were 557 pupils being home education in 2016/17 compared to 379 in 2011/12.

Councillors made a [series of recommendations that were accepted by the Cabinet](#), including the need for further analysis of the figures locally. There should also be a two-week cooling off period before taking pupils off the roll at a school is discussed. The council should advocate that school leaders include information about numbers of EHE children in their termly reports to governors/directors or other reporting mechanism that may exist.

The outgoing chairman of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board expressed concerns about home education before retiring. These were the chairman's comments:

“A number of parents elect to home educate their children and the Board recognises their right to do so. However, in common with a number of other LSCBs, we have significant concern about the limited powers local authorities have in evaluating and monitoring the appropriateness of these arrangements and assuring ourselves that the children are safe from harm.

“We welcome the consultation currently being undertaken by the Department for Education that is intended to support work to revise current guidance in this area and hope that this will result in a more robust and rigorous framework to ensure the safeguarding of children that are home educated. We hope that local MPs are able to advocate on our behalf to ensure the guidance is sufficiently strong to safeguard local children.”

7. County council responds to Highways England's expressway announcement

The county council welcomed the announcement of a preferred corridor for part of the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway as it offers a degree of clarity on where the final scheme would go. However, we were disappointed that we still don't know about access to the M40 through Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire County Council supports better transport links and accompanying infrastructure in the so-called “brain belt” but a project of this magnitude will inevitably have an impact on communities and the environment. The county council has said it will work to ensure that those effects are mitigated and that benefits are spread.

Our main “transport test” is that the Expressway should provide relief to congestion on the A34. It should not put more pressure on existing overstretched roads, but function as a separate strategic route alongside other local schemes.

We will continue to push Highways England for clarity on how the corridor choice is developed so that a decision can be made on the best route for the scheme.

8. Amazon Echo used as part of pilot to use smart technology to support home care

The adult social care team are piloting the use of Amazon Echo to reduce loneliness and isolation, while offering access to low level care via smart technology. The £75,000 project has seen the council negotiate with Amazon to provide the kit required for free, install broadband in trialists' homes, and deliver training for staff and users.

Aside from enhancing the quality of life for individuals the project also means that it's a smart way for carers to connect with their clients and for family and friends to be able to check in on a loved one and physically see they are well.

The technology could also allow some care resources to be freed up and directed to those in greatest need of personal visits. For instance, video calls can be used for reminders to take medication.

"Smart technology is part of everyday life for many people these days, so we must look at innovative ways of using it to enhance people's quality of life," said Kate Terroni, Director of Adult Social Care. "Technology also has the potential to enable our care providers to work smarter and be more able to respond to the growing demand for home care.

9. Councils work together of Oxford road maintenance

An agreement has been struck that will see Oxford City Council provide routine highway maintenance services in the city, for a period of up to five years, on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council.

The move reflects the county council's commitment to get the best out of its resources, and investing more money in road repairs. This has recently seen it commit to doubling this year's budget by adding an extra £10m, which will be spent on surfacing across Oxfordshire.

The city council, through its wholly-owned company Oxford Direct Services, will repair potholes, carry out resurfacing work, and deal with other road-related issues such as signing, lining and drains. The agreement builds on a long-standing arrangement which has seen the county council providing funding for the city council to do similar work on minor roads in the city.

10. County council backs 'active travel' with walking and cycling plans

The government is funding a project to improve cycling and walking provision as part of the [Department for Transport's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy](#).

The county council will initially produce Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) for Bicester, Didcot and Oxford. These will involve assessing existing walking and cycling routes, prioritising improvements and maintenance schemes designed to encourage active travel and reduce congestion and pollution.

Over 85,000 new jobs and 100,000 new homes are planned in Oxfordshire by 2031. The council is committed to ensuring that as the population grows, infrastructure is in place to encourage active travel. The county council recently produced guidance for developers and planners on designing in cycling and walking connections to new developments.