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County Councillor Report

Chinnor division

30th June 2025

Cllr Georgina Heritage

**What I’ve been doing - Meetings and Council Activity**

* **Traffic on Lower Icknield Way**: I requested a second speed survey to be carried out, as residents were disappointed that the survey in 2024 was conducted at a time when restrictions caused by development work affected the normal movement of traffic. During the new survey, the cable became damaged which OCC repaired and as a result extended the survey time. I’m now awaiting the results from this survey.
* **School bus service**: I was contacted by Sydenham parish council regarding the Lord Williams bus service, as it appeared that the service would no longer serve Sydenham. I contacted the cabinet member for children’s services, who promised to address the issue as a matter of urgency. He later called me to apologise and confirm to that the information had been sent in error and the Head of Fleet and Transport Services would issue an explanation and apology to the chair of Sydenham parish council. The subsequent email confirmed the bus service as follows:

*“Firstly, we apologise for any confusion or concern caused by the recent publication of the September 2025 timetables. We understand how important it is to ensure clarity and reassurance for families, and we take your feedback seriously.*

*To clarify, from September 2025, Oxfordshire County Council will no longer operate a contracted school transport route for this journey under the Spare Seat Scheme.*

*However, the service will continue to be provided by the current operator, Red Rose (Bus 321), as a public service.*

*The operator has confirmed that all existing stops currently used by Lord William’s students will continue to be served.*

*Therefore, there will be no disruption to the stops used by students from Sydenham, or surrounding villages.*

*We have already communicated these changes to parents who contacted the service directly, and we are grateful for their engagement.*

*Additionally, we issued a communication on 3 June 2025 regarding the school transport route. The initial timetable did not reflect the required stops however, we understand this has now been corrected”.*

* I’m becoming increasingly aware of issues regarding unadopted roads in new developments, sometimes caused by unfinished works. I became involved in such a situation in Lewknor and am aware of similar problems in Chinnor. Sometimes this can be a matter for SODC (if planning related) and sometimes for OCC, but your district councillors and I can work together to identify the nature of the problem and whether either council can assist in resolving.
* Following a meeting with Chinnor and Sydenham’s parish council chairs to brief me on their flood project and grant application, I spent some time with OCC Highways’ Carl Stallwood, who is actively working with several parish councils in our area. It was very useful to not only join him on his site visit to meet Sydenham’s chair, but also to spend a couple of hours’ office time with him which enabled me to gain a greater understanding of his work locally.
* I sat on People Overview & Scrutiny committee which noted and asked questions on an excellent report from Oxfordshire Employment Service, Oxfordshire’s dedicated employment service for supporting people getting into sustainable work. Oxfordshire Employment also provides supported internship opportunities, which are highly successful in supporting young people to enter work. If you are or know someone who has long-term health needs or a disability to gain and sustain employment, it’s a highly worthwhile service to explore, or please get in touch with me. It would also be great to hear from employers who might be interested in getting involved in the Connect to Work programme
* I was delighted to take part in celebrating the completion of the Princes Risborough extension and the reopening of the final section – the Chinnor Independent Line – of the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway. What an extraordinary achievement, and what a local treasure this railway is, run entirely by volunteers and supported by our local communities.. I particularly enjoyed talking to the volunteers about what they do and what they get back in learning, activity, friendship and fulfilment.

**County council asks for thoughts on the proposal for one single unitary council for Oxfordshire**

Oxfordshire County Council has launched a survey to ask local people for thoughts about its proposal for a single unitary council for Oxfordshire as part of wider local government reorganisation across the country.

There are three options on the table for Oxfordshire and while Government will ultimately make the decision regarding how the county goes forward, residents are encouraged to submit their views. This will help inform the development of OCC’s proposals.

The county council is proposing one unified council for Oxfordshire in its view that this will create stronger, simpler services that are closer to communities, cost effective and connected. This includes protecting and enhancing key frontline services like social care for children and adults, and public health, which are currently delivered at county scale.

I can appreciate there are different opinions on how Oxfordshire should proceed and I’m often asked about this subject, so I hope it might be helpful to have the following links for all three proposals:

1. [**A single unitary council for Oxfordshire**](https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s75551/Annex%202%20-%20OPTION%201%20FINAL.pdf) – [Oxfordshire Council](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/local-government-reorganisation-and-devolution/interim-proposal) (responsible for all services for Oxfordshire residents)
2. [**Two unitary councils**](https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s75531/Annex%203%20-%20Option%202.pdf):
	* [Oxford and Shires Council](https://twocouncils.org/home) (previously referenced as North Oxfordshire Council) created from the existing district councils of Cherwell, Oxford City and West Oxfordshire.
	* [Ridgeway Council](https://ridgewaycouncil.org/home) created from the existing district councils of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse and the unitary council of West Berkshire.
3. [**Three unitary councils**](https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s75532/Annex%204%20-%20Option%203.pdf) – with a unitary city on expanded boundaries (referred to as [Greater Oxford](https://greateroxford.org/)) as well as northern and southern unitaries, also including West Berkshire.

**Streetlighting Proposals**

Residents are being asked for their views on how to implement proposals to reduce streetlighting in parts of Oxfordshire where it is requested, and there’s still time to submit views, as the consultation is open until 6th July.

OCC is seeking the public’s views on how the ‘part-night lighting’ plans should work. The consultation will focus on how, not where, part-night lighting (PNL) might be implemented. Locations would be a matter for communities themselves to decide and would then be subject to a further local consultation.

Previous proposals, known as ‘dark skies’, were deferred in November 2024 after concerns were raised. As a result, the aim is to give communities the choice to introduce PNL in their area only if they want it.

People can take part in the consultation on the council’s [Let’s Talk Oxfordshire website](https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/pnl) until 6 July. Paper copies can also be requested at local libraries.

New proposals are expected to be presented for a decision by the council’s cabinet in September.

**Oxford Congestion Charge**

A proposed temporary congestion charge was considered by cabinet on 17 June, as the ongoing closure of Botley Road until August 2026 meant that the council’s plans to implement six trial traffic filters in Oxford had to be postponed. The transport team has therefore been exploring measures to tackle the pressing issue of traffic congestion on our roads until the traffic filters trial can be introduced.

The proposed temporary congestion charge scheme is designed to improve bus services and make it easier for those with permits - including carers, traders and blue badge holders - to travel by car into and around the city.

A temporary congestion charge could make use of the existing infrastructure and back-office systems intended for traffic filters. Any surplus income from the proposed scheme can only be put back into transport and could be used to fund travel improvements such as cheaper bus tickets and parking at park and ride sites.

A six-week public consultation on the introduction of a temporary congestion charge started on 23 June, with a view to implementing the temporary scheme in autumn this year. The consultation is to gather feedback on the proposed scheme's impact and details. The survey can be found here:

[Survey open for views on Oxford congestion charge proposal](https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/have-your-say-on-temporary-congestion-charge-for-oxford/)

You can also find further information in the [news release](https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxford-temporary-congestion-charge-among-options-for-traffic-improvement/) that was published.

**Oxfordshire takes SEND funding crisis to Parliament**

Oxfordshire County Council has provided evidence to the Parliamentary Education Select Committee’s inquiry into solving the national SEND crisis. In its written contribution, the council says that despite rapidly rising expenditure, reports from the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee show that outcomes are not improving nationally for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and neither have families’ day to day experiences of the system.

The council explained that it believes the current SEND system is unsustainable and requires immediate and comprehensive reforms to meet the growing number of children and young people requiring support.

Its evidence to the committee focuses on actions required to stabilise the system, such as increased funding, which would then allow more time for necessary medium to long-term reforms to be implemented.

**Councillor Sean Gaul, Oxfordshire County Council’s Cabinet Member for Children and Young People**, said: “The situation is unsustainable. The SEND high needs block deficit is expected to hit £100million in Oxfordshire by March 2026, with many other councils across the country in similar situations. The whole system is in urgent need of extensive reform.

“It’s a national problem – a national crisis – not a local one, but of course it impacts many families and children here in Oxfordshire.

“We’re calling for clarity on funding and long-term sustainable reforms to ensure we have a system fit for purpose that will meet the needs of every SEND child and young person wherever they live, and whatever their individual needs.

“Here in Oxfordshire, we are absolutely committed to supporting our children and young people with SEND and have committed significant investment in next year’s budget. However, we are acutely aware this will still not be enough and national government intervention is urgently needed.”

Oxfordshire County Council’s budget for the 2025/26 financial year, approved at its full council meeting on Tuesday 11 February includes £1.141m of extra funding for SEND services and education, health and care plans (EHCP).

A total of £641,000 of this would be additional money to complete EHCPs quicker and £500,000 to facilitate the provision of expertise from special schools focused on children with EHCPs who are in mainstream schools.

In the council’s 2025/26 budget, there is also £2million of new money, partly funded by new government grant funding, to support families to overcome challenges at the earliest opportunity, prevent escalation and effectively intervene with problems.

Alongside this, a total of £400,000 additional funding has been allocated to cover the costs of the increase in number of children with SEND requiring home to school transport.

**Specialist career advisers to help Oxfordshire’s SEND children**

To continue the focus on SEND provision, children with special educational needs and disabilities are set to benefit from support provided by career advisors, based at some of Oxfordshire’s specialist schools and colleges.

The newly trained advisors will be existing teaching assistants, equipped with necessary experience for handling the unique needs of young people with SEND, helping to improve their education and career outcomes.

Oxfordshire County Council is providing the training in collaboration with the [Oxfordshire Careers Hub](https://oxlepskills.co.uk/schools-colleges/oxfordshire-careers-hub/). Advisors will receive a Level 6 Diploma in career guidance and development from [Activate Learning](https://activateapprenticeships.co.uk/activate-business-school-career-guidance-and-development-level-6/).

The council’s commitment to the training is in response to a shortage of qualified career advisors with experience in the needs of children and young people with SEND, and to reduce the need to hire external specialists.

The scheme is being funded by a grant from the Department for Education (DfE), designed to provide support for young people with additional needs so that they gain more choice and control over their future, providing opportunities to prepare them for adult life and independent living. This includes work experience and placements, and further education.

The career advisors will be based at seven specialist schools, spread across the county and overseen by Oxfordshire County Council.

**Progress in creating a greener, fairer and healthier county in 2024/25**

Positive progress has been made in 2024/25 against priorities set for Oxfordshire County Council by its cabinet, with notable achievements in the council’s work to tackle climate change.

The 17th June meeting of the council’s cabinet was presented with the authority’s annual report, which detailed many positive developments during 2024/5.

**Achievements in 2024/5**

Action to tackle climate change lies at the heart of the council’s work and 2024/25 has seen the authority being ranked as the top performing waste disposal authority in England for the eleventh year running as well as expanding the council’s electric vehicle fleet and reducing operational emissions by 71%.

Since the report was published the council has been told that it is the best performing county council the UK for tackling climate change.

Meanwhile £3.6m has been secured to improve public EV charging to make driving electric vehicles more accessible in the county and more than 200 requests have been approved to reduce speed limits to 20mph in towns and villages. Five new bus routes began operating to connect more villages and market towns to Oxford following a £1.2m allocation from the council.

During 2024/5 the council planted 825 trees and 16 new community orchards. It completed more than 3,300 tree care operations and 20 new road verge nature reserves were designated.

The council’s work to support residents during the cost of living crisis includes providing 500 vulnerable households more than £1.2m in supermarket vouchers, energy credit and essential household items through the council’s government-funded resident support scheme; and providing £3.3m to ensure families entitled to free school meals received support during school holidays.

And in terms of wider support to the most vulnerable, the council was awarded local authority of sanctuary status for supporting people fleeing war, persecution and serious human rights violations - the first county council to do so.

Achievements around creating a healthier county include partnering with University College London’s Institute of Health Equity and renowned academic Sir Michael Marmot to become a “Marmot Place” – a two-year programme to tackle health inequalities and local communities.

Waiting times for social care assessments continued to fall, with the cumulative improvement over the last four years being 80 per cent. Meanwhile more people were supported to live in their own communities for longer with 3,186 packages of home care arranged.

The council’s discharge to assess programme has enabled more than 7,000 people to be discharged safely from hospital – an increase of 23 per cent compared to the previous year.

Many accolades were achieved by the council in 2024/5 including the 2024 LARAC Best Partnership award for improving recycling and reducing waste (jointly won with community action groups), and an MJ award for the “Cheers M’Dears” Community Support Service in Banbury.

The council’s performance and insight analyst team won the best teamwork award in the ONS Datathon 2024 and a construction project to improve Banbury railway station won a Green Apple Environment Gold award.