

Title	County Councillor's Report
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Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council to end formal partnership

Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council are in discussions to bring their formal partnership arrangements to an end. The arrangement between the two councils, which has taken the form of joint services under a single chief executive, has been in place since September 2018. The ending of the partnership would mean that joint chief executive Yvonne Rees will return to her substantive post as CEO for Cherwell District Council from the date of both full council decisions. Recruitment will take place for the post of chief executive for Oxfordshire County Council.

Public engagement on proposal to move Oxford United FC to Stratfield Brake (Kidlington)

Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet has asked officers to conduct a public engagement exercise on the proposal from Oxford United Football Club to develop a new 18,000 capacity football stadium with linked leisure and commercial facilities at Stratfield Brake in Kidlington (on land owned by the County Council). In addition to the stadium, the club's proposal includes facilities such as a hotel, retail, conferencing and training and community grounds.

We've asked that before any decision there should first be a period of engagement with the public and local organisations. This will run from January 25th to February 21st, and Cabinet will consider whether to proceed with negotiations at its meeting on 15th March.

Oxfordshire County Council Budget 2022-2023

OCC will shortly be agreeing its budget. This is the first budget of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance, a new administration for Oxfordshire which has been forged around a shared commitment to nine priorities. The three political parties of the Alliance (Lib Dems, Labour and Greens) are working together because we want to see a greener, fairer, healthier Oxfordshire. We want to build on our strengths while confronting the challenges we face: addressing climate change, tackling inequality, strengthening the resilience of individuals and communities, fostering more social cohesion and common purpose.

Our initial budget proposal in December had more than double the number of responses received last year. We are grateful to all those who gave us their views and have sought to reflect these in the proposals we are presenting.

The Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance called on national government to respond to the challenges facing local government in a meaningful way through the autumn spending review. Unfortunately, they did not. Instead, in adult social care for example, they directed that local authorities should use council tax to meet rising costs. This represents a double-whammy for households at a time of real pressure on living costs. In April, taxpayers will see national insurance contribution (NIC) increase with the new 1.25% Health and Adult Social Care Levy AND increases in their council tax bill to the adult social care precept: 2% that was planned by the previous administration and a further 1% added by the Chancellor in the budget.

In some areas, we have found that the sums provisioned for capital projects by the previous administration were inadequate. This is true of Kennington Bridge, where the £50million estimate that accompanied the outline business case in July 2020 accepted by the previous

administration is now projected to be £87million. We have no choice but to use this budget to provide £27million of the additional funding to allow this critical project to proceed.

The largest examples are the two Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) schemes. When the previous administration committed to government that it would deliver these schemes, it accepted the full financial liability for any additional costs arising. We now face disruptions to the supply chain, very significant inflation and labour shortages in the construction sector, through a combination of COVID and the policies related to the UK leaving the EU, which will inevitably affect the cost of these projects.

We have asked officers to redouble their scrutiny of future capital projects to make sure that the optimism bias displayed in the past is removed and we take a more sober and realistic assessment of the costs and risks associated with major programmes.

In light of the public consultation process, and after further discussion by the Cabinet, we are proposing some additional investments compared to the proposed budget:

1. £500,000 to support the review into home-to-school transport to assist in transitioning to any new arrangements, with a particular focus on supporting more active travel and more sustainable transport opportunities.
2. We are offering tenants of the Council in community assets a one-year rent holiday to take account of financial pressures many community and voluntary organisations have faced during the pandemic; we also commit to reviewing the management of these properties and put their arrangements on a more stable, predictable footing from 2023-4.
3. We will undertake a strategic rail feasibility study to establish what it would take to advance the proposals for new rail links to Cowley, Grove/ Wantage, North Cotswolds and West Oxfordshire.
4. We are investing in additional resource to accelerate our work on active travel in the county: planning for new schemes and advising on opportunities to integrate active travel more fully in future proposals.
5. We are replenishing the budget priorities reserve to allow for further investment in 2022-23 to (a) support projects that will generate future savings for the Council budget; (b) make early interventions to improve the lives of children and young people; (c) accelerate our climate response.

Local Transport and Connectivity Plan consultation

A reminder that the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) document and supporting strategies for freight, active travel and innovation were approved by Cabinet on 19 October for public consultation. The consultation will start on 5 January 2022 and run until 16 March 2022. View the approved documents here-

<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=24140#mgDocuments>

The LTCP is Oxfordshire's statutory Local Transport Plan. It outlines the long-term vision for transport in the county and the policies required to deliver this. This includes how we look at things like park & rides, which could be replaced with more innovative transport hubs.

County Councillor Priority Fund

I still have some funds remaining in my fund, which is for the period 2021-23.

To be deemed eligible for funding, applying organisations must have a committee and a constitution or appropriate rules setting out aims and objectives and how the group will operate. Projects must benefit Oxfordshire communities, be inclusive and provide good value for money. More info here –<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/community-and-living/thriving-communities/councillor-priority-fund>