

Oxfordshire County Council Parish Briefing

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT

Oxfordshire County Council has now received details of future grant funding from central Government and the levels are even worse than feared. The council had been preparing for up to £50m of savings from 2016 to 2020 (on top of the £292m it is already in the process of making for the period from 2010 to 2018). However, on the basis of figures provided by central Government last month, OCC will have to make £20m further savings on top of the £50m, bringing the total saving to £70m over the next four years. Central Government has changed the formula for funding councils, and it seems shire counties, particularly in the south of England, have come off worst.

The list of proposed savings for £50 million was already controversial, with many members of the public opposing them. To achieve the additional £20 million savings, no area of the council can be exempt other than those where there is a statutory obligation to provide for the most vulnerable in the county. This means other areas will suffer disproportionately, which will involve some very difficult and controversial decisions. By law, the Council has to pass a balanced budget with no revenue borrowing. The Cabinet recommendations will be published 18th January for decision 26th January, before the budget goes to Full Council on 16th February.

DEVOLUTION

OCC Leader Ian Hudspeth, District Leaders, LEP representatives and health colleagues attended a meeting with the Secretary of State in December to put forward the case for Oxfordshire devolution. The meeting was very positive, however Government has not yet said what it will ask for or offer. Any move towards a Combined Authority is very much dependent on this and will be preceded by a governance review. All aspects of the offer and governance have to be agreed by each individual council before a Combined Authority can be created.

FLOODING

Oxfordshire's High Volume Pump has been deployed to flood-hit areas in the North to assist with operations. The pump is crewed by seven fire-fighters, all of whom volunteered to go and help – thus missing out on New Year celebrations with their own friends and family. OCC Leader Ian Hudspeth personally thanked them for their commitment.

OXFORD FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME

A public drop-in event will be held on Tuesday 19th January in Oxford Town Hall. This event is running from 2:30pm to 7pm and is taking place as part of the consultation on the route options. All interested parties are invited to attend this event, or any of the other four local events:

- Wednesday 20th January – Abbey House (Council Offices), Abingdon, OX13 3JE

- Friday 22nd January – South Oxford Community Centre, OX1 4RP
- Wednesday 27th January – Kennington Village Centre, OX1 5PG
- Thursday 28th January – West Oxford Community Centre, OX2 0BT

The consultation is an opportunity for the public to view and comment on the various options that have been developed for the channel. It will be also be available online.

NEW OXFORDSHIRE LIBRARIES APP

Oxfordshire Libraries can now be accessed from smart phone or tablet. People can:

- manage their account
- search the catalogue
- renew and reserve books.

Bar code scanning is available on devices with a front-facing auto-focus camera.

Search for 'Oxfordshire Libraries' at the App Store or Google Play.

APPLICATIONS DEADLINE FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES

Families with children due to start primary school this year are being urged to ensure they don't miss the 15 January applications deadline.

Parents or carers of children born between 1 September 2011 and 31 August 2012 should visit the primary school admissions pages and apply online where possible.

Primary or junior school applications also need to be made for children currently attending an infant school who were born between 1 September 2008 and 31 August 2009.

COUNTY'S YOUNGSTERS IMPROVE IN CORE SUBJECTS

Oxfordshire's eleven-year-olds have surged ahead in reading, writing and maths tests, according to the latest figures.

The proportion of the county's pupils reaching Level 4+ in all three core subjects at Key Stage Two increased to 81 per cent in 2015 – up from 79 per cent last year.

It means the county has moved above the national average of 80% on this measure. The proportion of children making expected progress between the ages of seven and eleven is also higher than the national average for reading and writing, and in line for maths.

The recent Oxfordshire Reading Campaign, backed by the Oxford Mail and delivered by the National Literacy Trust, helped targeted primary schools make significant improvements in literacy attainment at Key Stage One and Two in recent years – with many schools intending to carry on using the programme.

Melinda Tilley, OCC's Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families, said: "This campaign work has helped create and sustain a real culture of reading and writing in participating schools, and I think it's fair to say we are seeing this reflected in these improving results."

TEMPORARY NEW HOME FOR OXFORD CENTRAL LIBRARY

Continuing work to transform the Westgate Shopping Centre in Oxford is to lead to the County Council's Central Library temporarily moving to a nearby location.

Redevelopment work at Westgate Oxford includes the complete transformation of the front of the current library building.

The existing frontage of the Central Library will be replaced to become part of the new curving wall forming the south side of Bonn Square marking the entrance to the new Westgate Oxford.

Once complete, the new Oxford Central Library, as part of the Westgate Oxford redevelopment, will feature a new entrance foyer, refurbished and extended children's library and new feature windows with views over Bonn Square and Castle Street.

While this work takes place, Oxfordshire County Council and the Westgate Oxford Alliance are working together to achieve a suitable relocation for the Oxford Central Library so that it can continue to be available to the public. The proposed location for the temporary library is in the nearby Castle Quarter.

Current plans are for the Central Library within the existing Westgate Centre to close to the public on February 27, with the new smaller temporary library opening its doors at the nearby Castle Quarter at the end of March where it would be stationed for 18 months until the new Westgate Oxford opens in October 2017.

Facilities available to the public from the temporary library will include a collection of books, audio books and DVDs for adults and children. It is also expected that children's activities and small scale reading events will be held.

Due to the size and facilities available at the site of the temporary library at the Castle Quarter, internet access, reference information, newspapers, journals and music services will not be available. However, these services will be provided at other libraries in the area. The library service's Reference Online service and eBooks and eAudio lending services will also be available. As ever, it will be possible to renew online, through the new library app.

The period between when the existing library closes and the new, temporary library opens, will allow for staff to move the materials to the new proposed location at the Castle Quarter. During this time, all usual services will still be available across Oxfordshire's other libraries, including those in and around the city of Oxford

Councillor Lorraine Lindsay Gale, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Cultural and Community Services, said: "We are very excited to see the progress being made at Westgate Oxford. While this means we will need to relocate the Central Library on a temporary basis as this redevelopment work continues, we are looking forward to moving the library into its new space in October 2017.

"We are looking at plans to relocate the new temporary facility to the nearby historic Oxford Castle Quarter. Although the temporary library will be smaller with some reduced services, I am sure it will provide an excellent environment for our library users and visitors to the city with all usual services still available across Oxfordshire's other libraries, including those in and around the city of Oxford.

“We all look forward to the Central Library reopening in 2017 and continuing to be a highly popular resource right at the heart of Oxford’s city centre.”

Sara Fuge, Development Manager at Westgate Oxford Alliance, said, “We'd like to thank all local residents for their patience and cooperation as the redevelopment of the city’s west end continues and look forward to welcoming everyone to the new Westgate Oxford when it opens next year.”

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

Kind regards



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