

Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council report

Cllr Nigel Simpson

July 2023

Oxfordshire County Council

£2 BUS FARE CAP

The Government have extended the scheme until 31st October 2023. From 1st November the bus fare cap will change to £2.50 for single tickets until November 2024.

POTHOLE INNOVATION TRIAL

After a winter that saw the number of potholes reported in Oxfordshire double compared to the same period last year and heavy criticism from the public, a trial has taken place aimed at improving the repair process. On Monday and Tuesday, 26 - 27 June, OCC and its highways contractor Milestone Infrastructure used the road between Steventon and East Hanney as a test site to trial seven different methods of filling in potholes or repairing minor defects requiring 'patching'. Some of these methods are already used in Oxfordshire – including the Milestone [dragon patcher](#) – while the others were new ones sourced by Milestone. The Hanney/Steventon Road was closed and a 1km stretch was divided into sections. Each section had a different type of pothole or patch repair carried out to get a direct comparison of the various methods. Last year, Milestone Infrastructure, a part of M Group Services, repaired 31,413 road defects. This was against a backdrop of perfect pothole-forming weather conditions – a prolonged freeze over winter followed by a protracted period of wet weather, which led to an unprecedented increase in the number of emergency pothole repairs. The trial will allow comparisons of the type of repair, equipment, material, and labour used, and the time taken. This would include an understanding of the potential results, longevity of repairs, waste generated, carbon impact, use of recycled content and productivity that may be achievable. The next stage will involve contractors returning for at least four more days of work and additional testing and analysis to enable a longer-term review of the methods.

MONEY-SAVING STREETLIGHTING PROJECT SET TO BE COMPLETED NEXT YEAR

All of Oxfordshire's streetlights are scheduled to be converted to energy efficient LED units in the next 12 months, saving millions of pounds and thousands of tonnes of carbon. The programme commenced under the previous Conservative administration. A total of 86 per cent of lights have now been converted. When completed, the £38 million project is expected to lead to energy savings of millions of pounds over the next 20 years. The LED lights will reduce the amount of carbon dioxide being produced by 70 per cent. Before the conversion programme started, the county's streetlights accounted for around 7,596 tonnes of CO2 every year – representing nearly 35 per cent of the council's total emissions.

OCC SEEKS GOVERNMENT PERMISSION TO ADOPT LANE RENTAL SCHEME

Utilities and other companies who close Oxfordshire's roads could be encouraged to minimise congestion and disruption when they carry out their work or face financial penalties of up to £2,500 a day. OCC will ask the government to allow it to introduce a lane rental scheme (LRS) which allows organisations working on the county's busiest roads at the busiest times to face extra charges. If approved, the LRS would encourage those working on the highway to prioritise off-peak hours and to complete the work as quickly as possible to reduce their costs. Surplus money raised by the council would be used to help manage and improve the highway network.

SEND OFSTED INSPECTION

We were notified by Ofsted that an inspection will be carried out this month of local services for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The services within the Oxfordshire local area partnership include Education, Health, Social Care and Families, and the inspection is designed to make sure the services offered by the council and our partners are effective.

The inspection will take place between 13 and 21 July. During this period, there will be five inspectors on site from 17 to 21 July, with specialisms across education, health and social care.

Cherwell District Council

Exemplary budget management and strong performance benefits residents

Cherwell District Council has demonstrated sound financial management in a challenging economic climate.

The council's Executive noted a report on Monday (3 July) highlighting that because of prudence, resourcefulness and fiscal responsibility, the council had come in on budget for 2022/23 (a £0.001m underspend) and maintained essential resident services.

As well as balancing the books through shrewd financial planning, the council achieved 32 of its 33 performance goals for the year, representing a 12% improvement compared to 2021/22.

The one goal narrowly missed was also a positive compared to the national picture. The percentage of waste recycled and composted in the district was 53.1% against the 56% target. This is 9% more than the 44% average for England.

Councillor Adam Nell, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance, expressed pride in the council's achievement: "We have been unwavering in our commitment to fiscal responsibility and prioritising the needs of our communities."

"Coming in on budget and contributing to reserves during these challenging economic times is a testament to our forward-thinking approach, hard work and dedication. We remain steadfast in our commitment to delivering exceptional services, fostering growth, and building a brighter future for our residents."

The Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report end of year 2022/23 report presented at the Executive is available on the council's [website](#).

The report: [Performance, Risk and Finance Monitoring Report End of Year 2022 - 2023](#) ☐ PDF 805 KB

We achieved a positive financial outcome for 2022/23, with a slight underspend of (£0.001m). This is a notable accomplishment considering the current economic conditions.

In addition to coming in under budget, we addressed several items that have significant benefits:

- We allocated £1.145m to reserves to offset a deficit in the business rates collection fund in 2024/25. This proactive measure ensures financial stability for the future.
- We identified underspends across different areas to compensate for a shortfall of £0.871m in Section 31 grant income. This was due to lower than anticipated business rates reliefs funded by this grant.
- By addressing these issues promptly, meant we achieved two important benefits:
 - It avoids adding pressure to the 2024/25 budget.
 - It relieved pressure on the 2022/23 budget, which initially planned to contribute to reserves for these specific issues.
- We had initially budgeted to use £1.200m from the capital fund reserves. However, due to underspending in other budget areas, none of this amount was necessary, and it has all been returned to reserves.
- Furthermore, we still made a £0.200m contribution to the General Fund, compared to a budgeted commitment of £0.500m.

GOSFORD HILL SCHOOL

The schedule of works for the planned new school buildings is as follows –

August 2023 – Designs submission
November 2023 – Planning Submission
April 2024 – Contract awarded
Summer 2024 – Commence work
Christmas 2025 – Work completed

GOSFORD HILL SPORTS CENTRE

Work will begin on refurbishment of the changing rooms will commence in the second week of July.