

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT JANUARY 2020 FROM CLLR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE

Services for children with special educational needs are improving in Oxfordshire, says inspector

Support for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) has made progress in Oxfordshire with senior leaders from the education, health and care services working effectively together.

This was the finding of a recent Ofsted review of SEND services following a full inspection in 2017. In the report Ofsted described the leaders as having an 'aspirational vision' for children with special educational needs and disabilities and inspectors found that leaders across the education, health and care system were taking full responsibility to improve the service. "Accountability has been strengthened and there is now a helpful mechanism for overseeing improvement," the inspectors said.

Ofsted said that three out of five areas that needed reviewing after the 2017 inspection are now making 'sufficient progress', while two need further improvement. Inspectors found that parents do not yet feel part of this vision and do not fully understand what work is being done to achieve it. Oxfordshire County Council recognises this challenge and is addressing it with education partners.

Inspectors acknowledged progress in the Council's and Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group's work to improve the quality of education, health and care plans (EHCs), which identify needs and set out the additional support to meet those needs. More EHC needs assessments are being completed within the statutory 20 weeks, despite a significant increase in the number of assessment requests. However, overall, the quality of EHC plans remains too variable, not reliably reflecting children, young people and their parents' aspirations.

Ofsted stated it was encouraged by the reduction in the number of school days lost to exclusion: 'Initiatives to reduce the high level of fixed-term exclusions in mainstream secondary schools are starting to make a difference... The rate of fixed-term exclusions for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs in secondary schools is also lower than it was in 2017.'

Council plans to improve online services and reduce cyber-threats

As more people access public services on computers or mobile phones, residents will see real improvements after Oxfordshire County Council revealed plans to 'future-proof' its digital systems as part of a two-year overhaul. Councillors approved a new information and communication technology (ICT) strategy, which will lead to investment in smarter, more secure systems and better customer services.

The county council's website gets 370,000 page views per week and receives around 1300 online payments per week. A new online Blue Badge application process with credit card payments launched earlier this year. Since then, nearly 70% of applications are online - previously it was 40%.

The county council has also signed up to the Government 'local digital declaration'. The declaration was made at the council's Cabinet and commits the county council to designing online services that meet the needs of residents, while protecting their privacy and security. The County Council is developing its ICT services with its partner Cherwell District Council, with a long-term ambition to improve digital connectivity across the whole county.

Oxfordshire community action groups gear up to tackle climate change

Community groups running repair shops, community fridge groups and carbon reduction schemes across Oxfordshire have taken control of their county-wide parent network. The network is funded by the county council as part of its long-standing environmental commitment.

During 2018-2019 the community action groups ran over 4,000 events, with 80,000 attendees, and contributing 51,000 volunteer hours - equivalent to 31 full time staff). Now the 65 community action groups (CAG) and are helping to reduce carbon emissions in Oxfordshire are taking over the reins to run it as an independent body. With continued County Council support and funding, a community benefit society will now coordinate activities from.

The County Council will continue to provide support and as a community benefit society the aim is to unlock new funding opportunities. We are keen that the community action groups will continue to flourish at a time when the County Council pushes forward its own climate action work.

Oxfordshire is named top waste recycler in England

Oxfordshire has been named the best performing County Council waste disposal authority in England for the sixth year in a row, thanks to residents' commitment to the environment. In 2018, residents recycled or composted a larger proportion of their household waste than the previous year, while the national average for recycling fell, according to new government figures.

Recycling officers at Oxfordshire County Council point to residents recycling more of their food waste as an important reason for the increase. Nearly 20,000 tonnes of food waste was recycled in 2018-19 – up 6% on the previous year. The district and city councils operate the kerbside collections of household recycling and waste, which Oxfordshire County Council then disposes of.

Overall 58% of household waste was recycled in Oxfordshire last year, compared to 57% the previous year. The national average was only 44.8%, according to the new figures from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Individually, the five District and City Authorities in Oxfordshire have also achieved excellent results above the national average.

Council waste officers said that there is still a lot more to be done to improve recycling rates and the county council is keen to see further improvements as part of its goal to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The Oxford Environmental Partnership of the Oxfordshire district, city and county councils has a target to increase recycling to 70% by 2025.

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Oxfordshire residents helped to “stay well” this New Year

Oxfordshire County Council is working with its NHS partners to promote a range of local health services to treat and support residents in the New Year and in to 2020, including measures aimed at reducing the pressure on hospital emergency departments. The advice for residents includes:

- Minor injuries units (MIUs) can treat deep cuts, small burns, sprains, sports injuries, infected wounds and foreign bodies in eyes. There are three MIUs in Oxfordshire (Henley-on-Thames, Witney and Abingdon) and also three First Aid Units in Oxfordshire (Bicester, Chipping Norton and Wallingford). The quickest way to be seen is to go through NHS 111. You can also turn up and be seen but you have to wait longer.
- Having a winter plan is also advisable which could include having a free NHS flu jab if you are eligible and keeping your home warmed to at least 18 degrees centigrade. Keep an eye out for elderly neighbours especially in the cold weather.
- Visit your local pharmacist for advice on coughs, headaches, upset stomachs and indigestion. Your pharmacist can help stop coughs and colds from getting worse.
- The Accident and Emergency Department at the John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford or the Horton General Hospital in Banbury and the emergency ambulance service provide vital care for life-threatening emergencies, such as loss of consciousness, suspected heart attack or stroke, severe breathing difficulties or severe bleeding that cannot be stopped. In these cases, call 999.

Extended hours make it easier for residents to see a GP

Patients can now see a doctor at weekends or evenings in Oxfordshire to help them stay healthy this winter. These extended hours appointments allow people to see a GP or other healthcare professional at a time that better suits them. People who contact their GP surgery or the NHS 111 service may be offered an extended hours appointment at their own surgery or at a nearby practice. Or, they can request one if it is more convenient.

Healthcare team work to help older people return home from hospital

Age UK Oxfordshire has joined forces with the NHS to help older people keep well during the colder months in a project backed by Oxfordshire County Council. Patients will be given specialist support by Age UK Oxfordshire staff to feel more confident on returning home from hospital and helped with accessing support in the community. Age UK Oxfordshire staff are based at the John Radcliffe Hospital. The support ties in with the health and social care system-wide ‘home first’ winter plan, which prioritises treating people closer to home and avoiding prolonged hospital stays. Contracted to work with the Trust for a year, the Age UK Oxfordshire team expect to assist with at least four discharges a day. The team are funded by Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

Free nasal spray vaccination for young children

Parents in Oxfordshire are being urged to have their young children vaccinated against the flu this winter. Children aged two and three can have a free, quick and painless NHS nasal spray vaccine at their GP surgery. In addition, primary school children in Oxfordshire can have the nasal spray vaccine via the school nurse service.

Smart bike lights trialled to gain insights on cycling infrastructure

Oxfordshire cyclists are testing a new 'smart' bike light linked to a phone app that will provide data on cycling journeys. The trial will provide transport planners at Oxfordshire County Council with valuable insights into travel patterns that will help improve cycling infrastructure. The project is one of a growing number of transport innovation projects backed by the county council as part of the 'Smart Oxford' programme, which applies digital technology to transport and environmental challenges.

The light operates in tandem with the app which then transmits data on the ride and route to a data hub where it can be analysed. Over 100 million points of anonymised data have already been collected Oxfordshire, showing where and when people cycle, as well as speeds, obstructions and road surface conditions.