

COUNTY COUNCILLOR'S REPORT TO PARISHES – JUNE 2020 BY COUNCILLOR LORRAINE LINDSAY-GALE

PRIMARY SCHOOLS – PARTIAL RE-OPENING ON 1ST JUNE

A key issue for the County Council this month will be welcoming more pupils back into our primary schools and early years settings. As Cabinet Member for Education, I am confident that our Headteachers will make safety, hygiene and social distancing 'absolute priorities' as they carry out risk assessments in preparation for welcoming back Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils in June.

PPE to Every School

As a contribution to the situation, this week, the County Council delivered hundreds of thousands of personal protective equipment (PPE) items to Oxfordshire schools:

IIR Masks: 151,000

Aprons: 181,000,

Gloves: 121,000,

Visors: 900,

Sanitiser: 7,500 litres.

In addition, support is being provided to over 900 early years providers regarding supplies of PPE.

94% Oxfordshire Schools have remained open

Since the lockdown began in March, 94% of Oxfordshire schools have remained open for children of key workers and those classified as disadvantaged. The council is committed to supporting disadvantaged children and existing free school meals arrangements will continue.

In preparation for receiving more pupils back to the classroom, schools are now being asked to complete a risk assessment in conjunction with staff and unions. The risks and challenges will vary, so what works in one school may not work in another. This means that some schools will be able to welcome more children, or more year groups than others. Should a school decide that opening up would provide too greater risk, then they should remain closed. No parent will be fined for keeping their children at home should they feel that would be appropriate. Each school will act in the best interests of each child and family.

Whilst current scientific evidence shows little COVID transmission among children, we will never be complacent. The health of children, teachers, support staff, and parents will always come first in Oxfordshire.

GOVERNMENT £250M GRANT TOWARDS ACTIVE TRAVEL

Cyclists and walkers are set to benefit from a concerted plan of action to clear and prepare the Oxfordshire's network of cycleways and footpaths ready for the expected rises in demand as lockdown is very gradually relaxed.

As the people of Oxfordshire look to return to work and school during the Summer, cycling and walking will become more important than ever – both offer zero emission ways to travel which will improve health and wellbeing as well as helping to address the need to keep socially distant.

A recent survey of all 63 Oxfordshire County Councillors found that the need to improve cycling infrastructure was a standout priority in terms of how Oxfordshire's share of the government's £250m Emergency Active Travel grant fund should be spent. The grant will be supplied in two tranches. Oxfordshire's share of the first tranche is only £597,000 but we are expecting that the second tranche will be in the region of £2-3m.

Amongst other practical and quick to implement measures, such as improving signage and sweeping the busiest paths and cycle lanes, keeping vegetation under control and fixing surfaces feature in our immediate plans of work. This is all part of keeping the network safe to use for cyclists and pedestrians as lockdown restrictions ease but will also hopefully encourage more people to walk and cycle in the long term.

There has been particularly clear support from Councillors, including me, for measures including a wider roll-out of 20 mph speed zones where supported by residents; the introduction of school streets to restrict motor vehicles around schools at certain times of day; improved cycling infrastructure, such as more cycle-only lanes in every town; and additional cycle facilities, such as more secure cycle racks at rural bus stops.

If people encounter any issues whilst out walking, cycling or riding on the path network then these can be reported or checked on Oxfordshire County Council's website. People can report a roadside vegetation

problem, as well as other street problems, through our online reporting tool [Fixmystreet](#).

REGISTRATION SERVICE – 1,600 BIRTHS

Oxfordshire Registration Service ceased birth registrations (as well as all ceremonies) on 24 March 2020 in line with changes to Government guidelines. Since that time the service has worked exclusively on the registration of deaths. The Coronavirus Act 2020 did not make any changes to the birth registration process. Face to face appointments therefore remain the only way in which a birth can be registered. In line with ongoing Covid-19 social distancing requirements, the GRO has set out guidance that all registration authorities should only conduct emergency birth registrations until further notice and we have adhered to this locally.

Emergency registrations are defined as:

- Adoptions – urgent cases referred to registration by social services to allow adoption proceedings to commence
- Safeguarding – urgent cases referred to registration by social services in order to safeguard a child at risk
- Deportation – urgent cases referred to registration by social services where the family are being deported
- Neonatal death – cases referred to registration by bereavement teams/specialist midwives where a baby has died and it is necessary to register their birth before their death
- Repatriation – for overseas nationals whose government has arranged a repatriation flight to enable them to return to their native country (evidence needed)
- Critical illness of a parent who needs to sign the birth certificate (evidence may be needed)

The Registration Service has been contacted by a number of families who want to register their child now but who fall outside of the emergency criteria. We are sympathetic to their situations but must act within legislation and GRO guidelines. Many of these families are also getting in touch with their Local Members and MPs to request support. This briefing is written to assist members to understand the position.

Nationally there is a 3-week pilot scheme underway to trial remote birth registrations. If this is successful, there will be a lead time to implement

these arrangements. In the meantime, registration authorities across the UK are hopeful that there will be an easing of the current guidelines soon which may enable priority cases to be registered. Other options are also being considered for providing a birth registration. With this in mind, the Oxfordshire Registration Service is putting arrangements in place to offer face to face (Covid Secure) priority birth registrations as soon as a room is suitably equipped and guidelines are eased. This will allow us to offer birth registration appointments first to those deemed to be 'priority'. Once we have notification from GRO that all birth registrations can recommence we can deliver the service to the 1600 births waiting to be registered. Priority cases are defined as:

- Parents who need a passport for their child due to an urgent need to travel overseas; for example, to provide care for a sick relative, work reasons, childcare reasons (evidence may be needed)
- Foreign nationals who wish to register their child for dual citizenship (evidence from consulate may be needed)
- Foreign nationals who were in the UK whose visa/work permit/accommodation is about to expire and need to return to their native country (evidence may be needed)

Parents are able to apply for child benefit and universal credit using the NHS number provided at birth. We continue to monitor all births in Oxfordshire and are maintaining a list of anyone who contacts us requesting a birth registration, identifying priority cases using the criteria set out above.