

Title	County Councillor's Report
Author	Cllr Robin Bennett
	Berinsfield & Garsington Division
Date	December 2021
Contact	robin.bennett@oxfordshire.gov.uk 07979 646815

Oxford foster carer encourages families to help give children the best start in life

People across Oxfordshire are being encouraged to consider becoming foster carers.

Oxfordshire County Council foster carers receive:

- Generous fees, paid in addition to the child's allowance, based on experience and skills.
- Welcome payment of £1,500, introduced to new foster carers at the start of November.
- Dedicated social worker support.
- Access to professionals involved with the child/children, linked with support groups and specialised training.

For further information about becoming a foster carer, visit www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fostering, email fostering@oxfordshire.gov.uk or phone 0800 783572.

Nominations open for Oxfordshire's Climate Action Heroes Awards

Individuals and community groups at the forefront of climate action in Oxfordshire are to be recognised by the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire, Imam Monawar Hussain.

The high sheriff's new Climate Action Heroes Awards built on previous awards during 2021 that celebrated Oxfordshire's COVID-19 heroes. People can submit their nominations using [an online form](#) and the deadline is 31 December 2021.

At the discretion of the judging panel, some winners may be awarded small grants to further their projects, provided by us. The grants are reserved for non-profit groups or organisations, who have been successful in the following categories: community action, social enterprise or young people/schools.

Changes to Oxford's bus network aimed at securing services

Oxfordshire County Council worked closely with Oxford's main bus providers on a service review, which was prompted by lower than usual passenger numbers, reduced government funding, and a national shortage of driving staff. It looked at how best to balance the available resources with the areas of greatest need.

As recommended in the government's national bus strategy, the council worked proactively with operators to identify opportunities for greater efficiencies through the reduction of unnecessary duplication, with the aim of placing the network on a more secure financial footing while minimising impact on passengers.

Most changes will come into effect in the new year, although the new X39/40 timetable is already in place. I am speaking to Oxford Bus Company/Thames Travel about improving bus stop signage in Oxford to reflect the new route and stops more clearly.

<https://www.oxfordbus.co.uk/services/THTR/X39>

Bus companies have done well to maintain services during these unprecedented times, and public transport is key to our plans to get more people out of their cars.

These changes will help to put the network on a more secure financial footing while we try to secure £56 million from the government's national bus strategy fund to improve services in the long term.

20mph pilot scheme arrives in Cuxham

A south Oxfordshire village has become the first pilot site for a scheme to make 20mph the new 30mph across the county. We brought in 20mph restrictions to Cuxham this week, putting in new speed signs and road markings and cutting back vegetation to make them more visible. Last month, the Cabinet endorsed proposals to make it simpler, quicker and less cost prohibitive to lower speeds to 20mph on most urban areas and village streets in places where it is both suitable and supported by residents.

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>

Do what you can to protect your Christmas from COVID

People in Oxfordshire are being encouraged to do all they can to take precautions to reach the Christmas period free of COVID alongside abiding by new government restrictions in response to the Omicron variant.

COVID still presents a significant risk, even if the chances of hospitalisation or death have decreased during 2021 for those who have been vaccinated.

Those who have come into contact with someone who has the Omicron variant will be told to isolate for ten days regardless of their vaccination status.

Getting vaccinated and boosted still remains the best way for Oxfordshire residents to reduce their chance of becoming severely ill with COVID, and boosters will soon become available to everyone over 18 years.

New Covid measures (as of 30th November 2021)

The following now apply:

- Face coverings are compulsory on public transport, in shops, and in settings such as banks, post offices and hairdressers. Hospitality settings are exempt.
- Secondary school children and teachers are advised to wear face coverings in communal areas.
- All international arrivals must take a day 2 PCR test and self-isolate until they receive a negative result.
- All contacts of suspected Omicron cases must self-isolate, regardless of their vaccination status. They will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace.

This action is being taken as a precautionary measure to slow the spread of the variant while the government gains more information. The measures will be reviewed in three weeks.

In terms of our services, we are working with those areas who are impacted by the new measures, including schools and transport services.

The government has also announced an [acceleration of the booster vaccination programme](#):

- All over 18s will be offered a booster in order of descending age groups, with the gap between second dose and booster reduced from six to three months.
- Children aged 12 to 15 will also be invited for a second dose three months after their first, and severely immunocompromised people will be offered a fourth dose.

We will continue to work with NHS colleagues to support the rollout of the vaccination programme across all age groups.

The new variant and the re-introduction of restrictions will be a cause for concern. However, the best way to protect ourselves and those around us is to follow public health guidance:

- Wear a face covering in crowded, enclosed spaces and when you come into contact with people you do not usually meet. In all our buildings, we strongly encourage people to **wear a face covering when moving around** in communal areas, unless you are exempt.
- Take [regular lateral flow tests](#), especially before visiting crowded places or meeting people who are at higher risk.
- Self-isolate and [take a PCR test](#) if you have any symptoms of COVID-19.
- Get fully vaccinated as soon as you can, including [booking a booster](#) when you become eligible.