

Title	County Councillor's Report
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Date	October 2022
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Warm places, welfare schemes and Council Tax support this winter

The winter ahead looks incredibly difficult for people of all ages, backgrounds and incomes and for businesses and organisations too. Prices for many essentials are rising steeply and the cost of energy is a particular concern.

In local government, we have much more limited powers than national government, but we try to use all of the influence at our disposal to make a difference to people's lives.

The council's Cabinet has agreed a list of proposals to assist local people – particularly the vulnerable – as they face the combination of inflation and the rising cost of energy over coming months. The measures include:

- The permanent provision of an emergency welfare scheme administered through the County Council's customer services team, to enable improved administration of the provision of food support to children in early years settings and the targeting of grants for those who are not benefiting from national energy support schemes.
- Libraries will be offered as **welcoming and warm places** for people to help with isolation, loneliness and mental wellbeing as well as warmth. A grants scheme for community venues to contribute to their energy costs is also proposed.

This will support existing activities (stay and play schemes, lunch clubs etc) as well as encouraging new initiatives. There will be a £100,000 fund available for organisations to bid to.

- A new grant scheme to support voluntary and community sector organisations to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. It will launch in October with an initial £100,000 of Oxfordshire Community Foundation funding and the County Council will match this with £100,000 of its own.

The grants will fund a range of organisations supporting community food services, money and debt advice, networks for older people and vulnerable adults and those working with families in need.

- The County Council will support the district councils in the Council Tax reduction scheme that aims to reduce the amount people with low incomes have to pay, as well as Council Tax hardship funds. Such funds give councils additional discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable by those facing difficult circumstances.
- Expanding the Better Homes Better Health programme allowing the scheme to reach fuel poor households with advice on reducing energy costs. There is also a £210,000 grant to Citizens Advice in place to maintain debt and benefits advice capacity to June 2023.
- A total of £322,000 of COVID funding has been assigned to the Care Workers Charity to provide crises grants for the most in need workers and access to the “Blue Light Card” staff benefit and discount scheme for all those working in the sector.

Speeding and noise disturbance on the A4074 and A4130

I have written alongside local councillor colleagues to both the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable, to express our frustration at the failure of Thames Valley Police to enforce speed limits on the A4074 and the A4130 in South Oxfordshire, or to respond to the concerns and evidence several parishes have presented to them.

We don't think it's acceptable that Thames Valley Police appears to be ignoring its responsibility for enforcing safe speed limits in our area, with a minority of drivers routinely breaking the speed limit on our local roads.

School transport

I'm in regular (almost daily) contact with the Schools Transport team, as some residents face continuing issues on this front.

The Berinsfield-Abingdon AB04 service is now being re-tendered, as we seek a more reliable service provision. A temporary solution in place for the next few weeks with a separate minibus for Europa School pupils.

It's been frustrating, but I know the team are really committed to making this work.

Consultation(s) on Central Oxfordshire Transport Plan and trial traffic filters 2022

These surveys have been extended and are now remaining open until **13th October 2022 (midnight)**. The Cabinet decision on how to proceed will be taken on 29th November.

Broad Street public space improvements

A new project for Oxford's Broad Street aims to create a more welcoming public space.

The project, expected to be ready later in October, will include sitting areas with planters for visitors to meet with friends to socialise or just take a break from working, sightseeing or shopping.

Local businesses and residents have been involved to ensure that the street furniture is made responsibly and locally, including robust wooden benches and seats made using reclaimed wood produced by [RAW workshop](#), an award-winning social enterprise based in Blackbird Leys.

'Decide and Provide' transport planning policy adopted

The council's Cabinet recently approved new requirements for transport planning for new developments based on the principle of 'decide and provide', rather than the previous method of 'predict and provide'.

This is intended to help the county move towards its goal of a net zero transport system by 2040.

The 'decide and provide' approach decides on a preferred transport vision and then provides the means to work towards it, instead of relying on past trends in car use and dependency.