

# **Oxfordshire County Council report – Cllr Robin Bennett, June 2021**

## **A report from your new County Councillor**

Firstly, a huge thanks for electing me, with 57% of the vote. I look forward to getting involved at the county council and supporting our local parishes. I will also be on the Planning and Regulation committee and the Minority Ethnic Consultative Forum at the council. Please get in contact to alert me to issues or if there is anything at county level I can assist with. I'd like to thank my predecessor, Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, for her efforts representing the area.

Since the 6<sup>th</sup> May elections, a new administration is running Oxfordshire County Council, comprising the councillors from the Liberal Democrat, Green and Labour groups. The administration is collectively known as the *Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance*. In the cross-party cabinet, my colleague Dr Pete Sudbury, the only Green county councillor before 6<sup>th</sup> May, holds the portfolio for climate change and environment. The new council leader is Liz Leffman of the Lib Dems, with Liz Brighthouse of Labour as deputy leader.

### **The 10 key objectives of the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance administration are:**

1. Tackling the Climate Emergency through rapid decarbonisation, proper accounting of carbon emissions and ambitious targets, as well as supporting climate resilience;
2. Tackling inequalities and providing opportunities for everyone in Oxfordshire to achieve their full potential;
3. Prioritisation of wellbeing – improved outcomes for residents and improved air quality and access to libraries, cultural facilities and the arts;
4. Review and reform of the social care system to prioritise end-users and carers with a focus on co-operative and community provision of social care, helping those who want to stay in their own homes;
5. Increased investment in an inclusive, integrated, county-wide active and sustainable travel network fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to improve choice and reduce car journeys across the County;
6. Improved access to nature and green spaces for all communities, and landscape-scale nature recovery across the county;
7. Supporting all our children and young people to achieve improved health, wellbeing and educational outcomes; improved provision for

children with additional needs; all decision-making to have regard to impact on young people and future generations;

8. The creation of a resilient local democracy where decisions are devolved to the lowest possible level and residents are meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect their lives;
9. Support for local employment and businesses, working with partners to make Oxfordshire a centre for green and sustainable technologies through a local 'Green New Deal'; we will use our purchasing power and contracts to maximise benefit to local employment and businesses;
10. Responsible management of the Council's finances, reducing wasteful outsourcing.

### **Councillor Priority Fund**

The Councillor Priority Fund is a sum of £15,000 per councillor that runs over the course of two years until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This is now open for applications and each councillor can use their fund to support community projects and organisations. Any eligible organisation can approach me directly to apply for this fund.

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/community-and-living/thriving-communities/>

Unsuccessful applicants will be offered feedback on their proposal and, where possible, we will work with organisations to help them identify alternative funding opportunities.

### **Transport surveys**

Oxfordshire County Council has launched a number of roads and transport online surveys, which are open to the public to comment on. The council is keen to hear views as soon as possible but people will have the chance to comment until February 2022. It is an opportunity for people to tell the new administration what you think about highways and transport services, including walking, cycling and road safety, and how we can try to improve them. I know many will have views on this, so please do have a look at the surveys.

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/roads-and-transport-survey>

### **An electric bus future?**

Bus users in the Oxford area could benefit from new, zero emission electric buses as the County Council prepares to take part in a new

government funding competition. At the council's June Cabinet meeting, officers will recommend the submission of an expression of interest in the Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme. The bid marks a step-change in the county's aspirations; we recognise that zero-emission buses are an essential part of meeting our climate goals, and we must also cut air pollution, reduce noise and provide more frequent reliable bus services. This ambitious submission to the government's funding competition is a good start.

### **Race and restorative youth justice**

Recently the youth justice service had a week-long Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) thematic inspection – focused on the experience of black and mixed heritage boys. A report covering all the local authorities visited will be published in the autumn. The inspectors were positive about the quality of casework, interventions and pre-sentence reports and fed back that management oversight and the restorative justice offer were both strong.

### **Walk to School week**

Hundreds of school children across the county got active in May by clocking up thousands of steps as part of our annual Walk to School Week. Run by Living Streets, the year-round walk to school challenge encourages children to collect badges each month as a reward for making journeys actively. Nine schools are currently participating in the walk to school challenge, with another 11 signed up to join in September.

### **Covid update**

At the time of writing, the number of COVID-19 cases in the county is on the rise again. This serves as a reminder that the virus is still very much in circulation and that we need to continue to be careful in order to keep Oxfordshire open and keep our communities safe.

### **Testing and test centres**

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, you must self-isolate and book a PCR test as soon as possible. The county's symptomatic test sites include:

- Oxford Parkway (OX2 8HA)
- Woodgreen Leisure Centre (OX16 0HS)
- Osney Lane, Oxford (OX1 1NY)
- Woodford Way car park, Witney (OX28 6JS)
- Oxford Brookes University (OX3 0BP).

Everyone without symptoms is encouraged to get tested twice a week – this applies even if you have been vaccinated. One in three people with COVID-19 don't have any symptoms – regular rapid lateral flow device (LFD) testing helps us to find these cases and prevent the spread of infection. There are a number of ways you can get tested – collecting home test kits, getting them delivered to your door or going to one of our testing sites

The latest Covid figures are available on the county council Covid dashboard- <https://phdashboard.oxfordshire.gov.uk>

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