

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS **NOVEMBER 2024**

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

RESIDENTS' SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the OCC "Residents' Satisfaction Survey" have just been published. It shows disappointment in rural areas, while residents the city of Oxford are more content.

Key points are:

- Overall satisfaction with council below Local Government Association average
- 32% believes the council provides value for money
- Oxford residents are far happier with the council than those in rural areas
- 57% of residents believe the council doesn't keep them well-informed
- 43% of residents are satisfied with council services (this is boosted by higher levels of satisfaction in Oxford)
- Maintenance of roads is rated by 68% of residents as the council's most important service, but does not feature in the list of council priorities (see below)
- Only 14% of residents are satisfied with the council's level of road maintenance
- Road maintenance is far more important to residents than anything else (apart from in the city of Oxford)
- The level of satisfaction with the local area as a place to live has declined from 84% in 2021 to 72% in 2024
- Residents were asked to give feedback on the council's nine priorities, but they were given no opportunity to say that the priorities were wrong e.g. road maintenance should be a priority
- OCC's no.1 priority is Climate Change, and in 2021 38% of residents agreed with this, but that has now fallen to 18%
- The clear message is residents want day-to-day practical matters (particularly roads) prioritised over ideological objectives – just 3% of the council's annual spend currently goes on 'Highway Maintenance'

As a reminder, OCC's nine priorities are:

1. Put the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
2. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
3. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
4. Support carers and the social care system.
5. Invest in inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport.
6. Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces.
7. Create opportunities for children and young people.
8. Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy.
9. Work with businesses/partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

There is a perception in rural areas that the city of Oxford receives favourable treatment. Net satisfaction figures with respect to the way OCC runs things add weight to this:

- Oxford 36%
- Cherwell 14%
- South Oxfordshire 14%
- Vale of White Horse 10%
- West Oxfordshire 6%

FREE BIKE LIGHTS AND HI-VIZ JACKETS FOR OXFORD CYCLISTS

A road safety event in Oxford city centre this month (November) will include the opportunity for cyclists to get free bike lights and hi-viz jackets to make them safer on the roads. OCC, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (OFRS), the University of Oxford and Thames Valley Police are teaming up to hold this 'Vision Zero' safety event.

PENSION FUND DIVESTS FROM TOBACCO, THERMAL COAL AND TAR SANDS

Investments into companies that derive significant revenues from thermal coal, tar sands and tobacco production have been excluded from investments by the county's Pension Fund Committee, which is hosted by OCC with representatives from other organisations as members.

SHARING PEOPLE'S STORIES THROUGH ART IN A NEW EXHIBITION

During October, visitors were able to vote for their favourite artwork at an annual exhibition showcasing the work of the county's residents, with a focus on the representation of people. This year, 69 submissions were received, with the 49 that shortlisted put on display in the Garden Gallery at the OCC-run Oxfordshire Museum in Woodstock. The exhibition included prizes for artworks that most effectively depicted the theme of people.

RESIDENTS URGED TO HAVE THEIR SAY ON LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY

Oxfordshire residents, landowners, businesses, farmers and other organisations are being offered the chance to help shape the priorities for recovering areas of nature and wildlife across the county. Last year, Oxfordshire County Council was named by the government as a responsible authority for driving nature recovery. The council is one of 48 authorities who have been funded by the government to work with local people and organisations to develop a local nature recovery strategy (LNRS). Comments are now being sought on Oxfordshire's draft LNRS as part of a consultation which runs until 26 November 2024. The document, maps and online survey are available at the Let's Talk Oxfordshire website.

OCC BUDGET PLANNING PROCESS

Updates on OCC's budget planning for 2025/26 and beyond were presented to the cabinet on Tuesday 15 October, with new budget proposals to be published in late November and a final budget set in February 2025. At this stage calculations are being made on the basis of a 1.99 per cent council tax rise – the new government has not set out a policy on any council tax rise limits. Other key information also needs to be confirmed, including how the national living wage will operate from 1 April 2025.

IMPACT OF 30 OCTOBER NATIONAL BUDGET ON COUNCILS

The whole range of implications of the Budget on OCC will not become clear until the Local Government Policy Statement in November and the Local Government Financial Settlement in December, but the council will face a substantial rise in overheads if the increased minimum wage and higher Employer National Insurance costs are not funded by Central Government.