

REPORT TO PARISH COUNCILS MAY 2022

FROM CLLR DAVID BARTHOLOMEW

GENERAL OCC REPORT

CONDITION OF ROADS AND PAVEMENTS SHOULD BE THE TOP PRIORITY

An Ipsos survey ahead of the local elections found that 50% of people believe the condition of roads and pavements should be the top priority for councils. Regrettably, these matters do not feature in OCC's nine top priorities.

THE VEGANISM DEBATE ROLLS ON



The controversy about the administration's decision to offer only vegan meals at Full Council meetings continues. The first such meal on 5th April attracted local and national media attention, prompting critics to ask how it could be more climate-friendly to serve imported fruit and vegetables such as kiwi and mango, rather than locally produced meat and dairy products. Far too much time is being spent on this ideological distraction when the council faces significant challenges in areas more pertinent to its core functions.

TRANSGENDER RIGHTS MOTION

A LibDem councillor successfully moved a motion at the April meeting of Full Council dealing with a number of transgender issues and stating that one gender inclusive bathroom should be installed in every public building owned or operated by the Council. The Conservative Opposition abstained on the basis that: the topic was far too complex and sensitive for a short council debate; the motion didn't provide significant safeguards for women; and that the costs of the building works were unspecified and could run into six figures.

POLICE CRITICISE 20MPH SPEED LIMIT PROPOSALS

As previously reported, the administration is spending £8m on the cosmetic exercise of switching signs from 30mph to 20mph on 85% of the county's roads with a 30mph limit. The 20mph limit is in effect voluntary as it will not be enforced by the police. The measure has continued to attract police criticism and a spokesman said: *"There is a proven link between road environment and character and the speed of drivers. If it is not accepted as realistic it will quickly be abused and be the source of constant demands for police action. The police stance still reflects that 20mph limits and zones should be self-enforcing."* Press report [here](#).

SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Accommodation

The majority of the accommodation visits across the county have now either been carried out or booked in. The number of properties being rejected for overcrowding or poor housing conditions remains very low in every district. There are a small number of partially approved properties that are waiting for improvements. The number of properties where guests have arrived before the accommodation visit takes place is also very low. OCC will continue to book in visits for new host properties that enter the system over the next few weeks.

Community support

OCC has been working with Asylum Welcome to ensure that both hosts and Ukrainians have access to a network of support – and that it is as safe and effective as possible. Asylum Welcome is keeping a track of all offers of community support across the county. To make best use of this significant response, together, OCC is proposing to expand the community liaison officer resource available in each district and the city to coordinate, advise and refer guests to the support that is available to them, including across housing, education and health.

Schools

School places are being found for Ukrainian children. Applications for school places from guests are being considered alongside all other applications but we are working hard to ensure that places are offered as close as possible to where guests are living.

Health

The government has recently published some [guidance](#) to help primary health care professionals assess and address the health needs of Ukrainian guests.

Help with queries can be found here:

- **Website:** www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ukraine
- **Oxfordshire Ukraine helpline:** +44 1865 966444 / 01865 966 444 (opening hours: 8.45am - 5pm, Monday to Friday. Closed weekends and bank holidays).
- **Email:** ukraineresponse@oxfordshire.gov.uk

OCC COMMITS TO ENABLING MORE TREES TO BE PLANTED

A change in approach will help increase the number of trees in Oxfordshire after a new policy with cross-party support was approved. The policy will put the emphasis on a 'presumption in favour of trees'. Bill Cotton, Oxfordshire County Council's Director of Environment & Place, said: "This is a bold and ambitious long-term policy to increase investment in trees across the county. Trees are valuable assets for so many reasons and we aim to give them more prominence when looking at areas including planning, transport, connectivity and health. "We want to move away from simply maintaining and managing the trees on our land to actively encouraging and enabling more trees to be planted in both rural and urban settings. This can help tackle climate change and increase resilience to it, as well as improving people's quality of life – both now and in the future." One requirement of the policy is to plant two new trees for every tree that has to be removed from county council land. It also promises to explore new tree planting opportunities and extra investment to carry it out, stricter guidelines for those wanting to remove existing trees and implement proactive care to prolong the lives of established trees.