

Oxfordshire County Council Parish Briefing

June 2019

Social workers identify ‘county lines’ risks

Social workers from Oxfordshire County Council are set to use a new “screening tool” as part of their work to help children being exploited by so-called “county lines” drugs gangs and those who may be at risk of being exploited.

The numbers of such children at any one time is comparatively small both locally and nationally. But organisations in Oxfordshire regard any child being abused as one too many and are determined to make it hard for drugs gangs to operate in this way.

Councils, Thames Valley police, the NHS and other organisations in Oxfordshire have had real success with a “screening tool” that helps frontline staff to spot children at risk of child sexual exploitation. Now the approach has been adapted to cover all forms of exploitation including child drug exploitation. The screening tools lists the factors that in combination would show if a child may be starting to become at risk of being exploited – triggering professionals to act quickly. Meanwhile social workers are joining forces with the police, NHS and district councils to provide support for specific school communities when that school has raised concerns that students might be being targeted by gangs.

In these circumstances, professionals from each agency work closely and intensively as a support team surrounding the young people in question and their families. Local meetings for schools and other professionals are held to identify children at risk of getting drawn into the drugs gangs.

Details of rolling road closures for professional bike race announced

Details of short ‘rolling road closures’ have been announced for the Oxfordshire stage of the OVO Energy Women’s Tour professional cycling race on Wednesday 12 June. The county council has been working closely with the event organisers to minimise disruption to road users.

Typically, the lead motorcycle instigating the closure is 15 minutes ahead of the lead rider. The closure then remains in place until all riders and race cars have passed through.

Starting in Henley-on-Thames at 10:30am, the race will traverse the Chilterns via Pishill to Watlington, before returning via the climb of Britwell Hill to Sonning Common and Goring.

After crossing the River Thames at Wallingford, the route will pass through Didcot, Harwell and Wantage, crossing the Vale of White Horse to Faringdon, before looping through the West Oxfordshire towns of Burford, Charlbury and finally Woodstock; the finishing line will be in the grounds of Blenheim Palace. The leading cyclists are expected to cross the finishing line just after 2:15pm. We have published a full list of roads closed on race day here, including a fly-through map, and video showing how a ‘rolling road closure’ system will be used to minimise disruption.

County council announces major £3.5m highway improvement programme

More than more than 50 miles of road across Oxfordshire will be given a new lease of life thanks to the 'surface dressing' technique which waterproofs and extends the life of roads.

The cost of the work is in the region of £3.5m which is seen as a good investment, potentially preventing the need for more costly resurfacing for several years.

County Councillor Yvonne Constance, Cabinet member for Environment, said: "Oxfordshire County Council takes road repairs and maintenance very seriously and has put around £25m extra into fixing highways in total this and last year as part of a £120 million investment in infrastructure.

"Surface dressing is an excellent way to extend the life of roads and is cost effective. It is just one of a range of techniques that we use to improve and preserve the condition of our highways across Oxfordshire."

Many people will know surface dressed roads for their appearance soon after the work is done. However after a short period of bedding in, loose chippings are swept away and the surfaces are indistinguishable from any other except for the absence of cracks and potholes. Skid resistance is also improved.

The county council has gained a reputation in recent years for innovation and, as part of the surface dressing programme this year, will be trying out a technique called 'Surface Seal' - an additional treatment added to a newly dressed road, which prevents prevent defects, cracks, and potholes. The surface seal also enhances the appearance of the new surface giving a deep and uniform black which is comparative to a new asphalt surface.

County and city councils drive through plans for joint park and ride operation

A new management arrangement for park and ride services designed to reduce congestion and improve air quality was agreed by the county council and Oxford City Council's Cabinets last month.

Under the new arrangement, the city council would take over the operational management of two county council park and ride sites - Thornhill, Oxford Parkway (formerly Water Eaton) – from September 2019.

Traffic, congestion and parking are big issues for Oxford. By working together, the councils aim to provide a better service for users and attract even more people to the sites.

There are also savings and efficiencies for the county council, which will allow it to continue to focus on reducing congestion and improving air quality in the thriving city of Oxford and beyond.

Earlier this year the county council introduced new lower season ticket prices at Thornhill and Oxford Parkway park and ride sites with the new tickets being valid at all park and ride sites.

Electric vehicles contribute to county council's carbon neutral commitment

Oxfordshire County Council has taken delivery of a new fleet of electric cars and vans for its fire and rescue service and general staff pool car resource.

As the largest council in Oxfordshire, the county council has already taken a strong lead and committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. Achieving that aim will benefit the county's thriving communities and mean radically changing the way some things are done.

Along with the commitment to being carbon neutral the county council has also signalled its dedication through high-profile sustainable energy projects like Local Energy Oxfordshire, the V2GO charging initiative as well as seeking to reduce the number of miles its staff travel by encouraging flexible working and greater use of virtual meeting technology.

The vehicles can travel up to 160 miles on a single charge and will be used by Fire Safety Officers and as pool vehicles. There are charging points at fire stations and County Hall.

New funding for alcohol reduction services in Oxfordshire

Funding has been secured from Public Health England for the development of alcohol services across Oxfordshire. A grant of £215,000 has been awarded, as part of £6m allocated to local authorities for 2019-20, to make it easier for people with alcohol problems to access help.

This follows the PHE enquiry findings in 2018 that there are high levels of unmet need, with an estimated four in five alcohol-dependent adults not accessing alcohol treatment.

The funding will be used for projects across the county, including a new standalone alcohol clinic in Oxford, provided by community drug and alcohol service Turning Point, which will support those people who may not identify as being dependent on alcohol.

This funding will also support a homeless hub in Oxford city centre run by Oxford City Council, a family-focussed county-wide community project, and a homelessness hub run by the Salvation Army in Bicester.

County council appoints new chief fire officer and director of public health

Rob MacDougall has been appointed as Oxfordshire County Council's new Director of Community Safety and Chief Fire Officer. Rob is currently Assistant Chief Fire Officer and will replace Simon Furlong, who is retiring from the post later this year.

"I am dedicated to continuing to deliver the best services we can for our residents by doing our core business exceptionally well while continuously looking for new ways to reduce the risk of harm and enable access to opportunities for all to thrive," said Rob.

Ansaf Azhar has been appointed as Oxfordshire County Council's new Director of Public Health, following the retirement of Jonathan McWilliam. Ansaf was the Interim Director of Public Health for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council in the West Midlands and will take up his new post in August.

"I believe we have a fantastic opportunity to build on the good work done in Oxfordshire so far and continue to create a healthy place with our residents," said Ansaf. "A place that will promote healthy behaviours and thriving communities whilst reducing inequalities across Oxfordshire."

Pupils step out for Walk to School Week

Thousands of Oxfordshire pupils took part of national Walk to School Week (May 20-24), as part of the county council's ongoing commitment to encouraging walking and cycling to improve health and reduce congestion.

More than 60 primary schools signed up to the campaign to promote exercise, improve road safety and reduce congestion. Schools are also being urged to sign up to support Clean Air Day on June 20, encouraging pupils to make active journeys and reducing air pollution outside the school gates.

Walk to School Week is an extension of the WOW project supported by Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health team working in partnership with Active Oxfordshire. 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.

Since the launch of WOW across Oxfordshire in September 2017, active travel rates in participating schools – including walking, cycling, scooting or 'park and stride' – have risen from 65 per cent to 88 per cent.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you require any further information.

Kind regards

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