

Oxfordshire County Councillor Annual Report Annual Parish Meetings 2026

Councillor Gavin McLauchlan

Administration changes at County Council

In May 2025 we had the local County Council elections. Whereas prior to May the Green Party had been in a joint administration with the Lib Dems, post elections the Green Party had more County Councillors, but were not in a joint administration – as the Lib Dems now have enough seats to not need our support (sadly!).

This has meant that the make-up of OCC has changed significantly in the last year. The Lib Dems run the council with a majority of 37 seats, with Labour (12) and the Conservative Alliance (12 – after scooping up some independents) in opposition. The Green Party now have 7 seats, and there are two remaining independents.

Big wins and frustrations:

During the year at County, we have had some significant wins as a Green Group, we have managed to get most of our motions voted through the system – including important local ones on the Abingdon reservoir and more recently the Oxford Living Wage for all OCC staff. Being mostly new to local government we have managed to understand how the system operates and use it to work for us. This applies especially to the constitution which can be immensely frustrating and seemingly very inefficient. We are looking at means, cross-party, to tighten up the constitution and make it work better for everyone – members and officers alike. As part of this process, we have looked at what happens in other Counties and Unitaries but also applied logic to our own processes and will be recommending tweaks at the July Full Council.

The Budget:

In February the Lib Dems presented their budget to council, we had several opportunities to question them and officers on how we could amend the budget given declining central governmental financial input over the coming (final – more of later) years of Oxfordshire County Council. The government are significantly reducing their contributions to most councils in the next three years – targeting their funds towards deprived areas. For OCC this means that we will be short of c.£45m in the next three financial years (ramping up from £5m in 26/27 to £27m in 28/29). When viewed as a whole Oxfordshire is a wealthy, thriving county – scratch the surface, however, and we do have some of the most deprived areas in the country.

OCC are not in a bad financial position compared to many counties. With the vast overspend on **SEND** by all counties many UK counties are carrying a substantial debt – enough in about 45% of instances to bankrupt the councils concerned in the near future. Thankfully central government have finally stepped in to resolve this issue. Initially this was going to be resolved last year, then pushed out to 2028 – they have now realised the financial carnage this would cause and have stated recently that they will refund 90% of the overspend in this financial year. To OCC this is a significant sum.

In the OCC budget the Green Party had the only amendment accepted at February's full council. In doing so we now have monies dedicated to the improvement of path and cycle ways, and further finance allocated to social cohesion and environment issues.

It's not all speeding, flags and potholes!

But mostly...

If I were to look back at the resident complaints over the last year the vast majority would fall into one of the three categories above. However, things should be looking rosier going forward.

Speeding is being addressed with new speed limits on the A4074 (and a redesign on the Dorchester bypass) and its tributaries. These haven't all been implemented yet with some coming in over the coming year. We have also seen a bigger Thames Valley Police presence along the A4074. Any reduction in speeding limits will be ineffectual if it isn't backed up by a physical deterrent and consistent monitoring.

Flags are finally being properly pursued by OCC. Raise the Colours has been placing flags (of various guises) on OCC street furniture over the last six months. This has been incredibly polarising. Some supporters claiming it to only be a Patriotic statement, others seeing them as nothing but a divisive and racist act from the far right of British politics. For a brief period, OCC bought in a contractor to take the flags down, however even though this was undertaken late at night with the contractor personnel wearing balaclavas, they were threatened and had to stop. During this period c.400 flags were removed at a considerable cost to the council. Recently OCC have issued a formal legal notice to Raise the Colours to stop them from placing flags on lampposts. If the group does not comply with the letter, OCC will consider all available options to include, but not be limited to, civil and criminal proceedings against the organisation and individuals affiliated to it.

Potholes have been a nightmare this winter. From a Highways perspective they have been hit with the worst combination of weather - cold nights, warm days and rainfall way above our averages. This has also been exacerbated by increasingly heavier cars which cause much of the damage to our roads (electric cars are heavier than their petrol-driven equivalents). In February and March, we saw a tripling of pothole repair teams out and about in Oxfordshire – but with the sheer volume this still left many untouched, and OCC has seen claims for pothole damage increase vastly (500+%) versus the same period in 2025. To avoid the same happening again next year OCC are spending £8million over the coming few months on surface treating our roads. Oxfordshire, according to the latest (2024) figures, have some of the busiest roads in the country with 4.79 billion vehicle miles travelled.

Outside the above there have been other concerns expressed – the state of OCC owned land and structures adjacent to the highways, the state of active travel routes and the condition of pathways. These we have looked at on a case-by-case basis over the year, and where necessary I have brought them to the attention of the right department in OCC – either directly or via our Councillor enquiry platform.

Very recently **household waste disposal** has been an issue. We are monitoring this new system (registering before going to the tip), looking at the data and allowing it to settle in. If proven to be counter-productive and causing an increase in fly-tipping this will be challenged at future Full Councils.

Local Government Reorganisation:

The public consultation on the above has recently closed. Three options have been put forward to the government on how Oxfordshire County and the district councils can be reorganised to pull all functions under one body. Thus, in theory, saving money and creating efficiencies. These options have been looked at and discussed in Parish Council meetings many times over the last year, so I won't go into too much detail here – you all know the lie of the land. Suffice to say the three options are:

- One Unitary: Oxfordshire (as now, but with the District Council functions merged in)
- Two Unitaries: North and South (Ridgeway – incorporating West Berkshire) Oxfordshire
- Three Unitaries: Greater Oxford (with a vastly extended boundary), North and South Oxfordshire

This will be decided on by the government in the coming months. What this will lead to are (probably) elections in May 2027 for those standing for the new Unitary/s. This new structure will run in tandem with the existing bodies for a period of a year after which a full handover will happen in 2028. Well, that's the current plan!

What is unclear is what structure/s will be chosen by the government, and how “the Greater Oxford Development Corporation” (please see the SODC annual report for details on this) plays into this. Suffice to say look out for another important consultation later this year. We will make you aware when this comes out. Equally unclear as yet is the overall Thames Valley Devolution structure – again mentioned within the SODC annual report.

These changes will undoubtedly impact Parish Councils, although we do not know how, yet. There will certainly be a lower representation through Councillors in any of the new structures (some more than others).

OCC Councillor Priority Grants:

My Councillor Grants (£10k over two years) are now fully allocated. I have taken the approach to split the sum equally between each of the Parish Councils I represent.