

Oxfordshire Together

Giving communities control over local services

October 2015

Oxfordshire County Council is looking at alternative ways in which we can work with towns and parishes to deliver a number of different public services across a wide range of areas. We are already working with local communities to deliver services like grass cutting and community libraries, and through the Oxfordshire Together initiative we want to begin discussions with towns and parishes to identify opportunities to give them greater control over delivering local services.

A successful initial engagement event was held on 21st September at the Kassam Stadium in Oxford and was attended by over 110 local councillors and clerks who are now considering the proposals in more detail.

The discussion was led by Councillor Ian Hudspeth, the Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, and the event featured two presentations from the county council as well as a speech from Mike Kennedy, town clerk of Henley-on-Thames Town Council. The presentations were followed by a Q&A session during which all the participants had the chance to voice their opinion, ask questions, and share their ideas about how the proposals might work in their community.

Cllr Hudspeth explained that due to the huge financial challenge faced by the county council, we cannot continue to deliver some public services in the same way as before and we are looking to empower towns and parishes to provide more if they wish to do so.

By delivering these services locally towns and parishes can achieve an enhanced quality of services and take ownership of the local environment. Additionally, this model allows for local decision-making and responsiveness, as well as providing opportunities for local employment.

For those too small to consider delivering services alone, Oxfordshire County Council proposes a cluster model, with nearby towns and parishes pooling resources and expertise.



Owen Jenkins, Service Manager for Highways, Transport and Waste, outlined which services are being considered for local provision and how these could be funded if local councils were to take them on.

The initial focus of the work is around highway services, but there is scope to include other services in a similar way in the future. For a full list of the services in scope please visit our website: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether.

Owen emphasised that Oxfordshire County Council understands that no town or parish is the same. We are ready to start a conversation with towns and parishes as to what they can take on and we invite expressions of interest for these and other services.

Mike Kennedy, Town Clerk of Henley-on-Thames Town Council, shared his experiences since taking on delivery of some services from the county council.

Mike said that, in his experience as town clerk, residents are not normally concerned who delivers these services so long as they are done to a good standard, and that residents are generally understanding of the need to raise the precept to pay for services providing this is well communicated. Mike also spoke of how the town council have been doing verge cutting on behalf of the county council for 8 years, to a higher specification than the agreement requirements and with more frequent cuts.



Some questions and comments from the Q&A session:

Q. We need to differentiate between the sizes of organisations; some parishes don't have the resources to deliver some of these services.

A. In this situation the parish might consider forming a cluster with other town or parish councils, and we would be happy to assist you in making these work.

'We took on responsibility for grass cutting 18 months ago as a result of the timing of the cut. We found that we have been able to deliver using a local gardener – we can now make a call and have the grass cut the same day. We are looking at linking in with local hospitals to create green gyms and are currently talking to the scouts to see if they can do grass cutting on a volunteer basis'. – Brightwell cum Sotwell PC

Q. Will you be offering other services to communities in future?

A. Yes, we are considering which other services can be delivered locally and welcome suggestions.

Q. What happens if a council decides not to take on delivery?

A. The county council will continue to deliver the statutory minimum service. Oxfordshire Together is about giving communities an opportunity to deliver enhanced services.

Next Steps

Over the next couple of months we will be working with town and parish councils interested in taking on delivery of some services to develop agency agreements. There is an assumption that 'one size does not fit all' and therefore there will be a differentiated approach in each community. The county council will also be happy to facilitate the forming of local 'clusters' during this time.

More information about our vision can be found in the **Oxfordshire Together – the Model** booklet, with further details on some of the initial services in scope included in the **Transitional Offer of Highway Services** booklet. Both documents can be found on our public website at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether.

Following the successful town and parish meeting, we would like your involvement in taking the proposals forward, and would welcome your questions, comments and ideas.

If you have any queries or would like to get in touch regarding delivering services in your area, then please contact us at localities@oxfordshire.gov.uk.