

County Councillor Report

Chinnor division

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Local Matters – What I’ve been doing

The **Lower Road (with Station/Thame Road) junction** in Chinnor has again, and quite understandably, been a main topic of correspondence over the past month. My relief that the much-needed improvements had been brought forward was short lived as I, along with other local residents, enjoyed the beautiful resurfacing for three full days before Thames Water began their own works in the same area.

I was as disappointed as everyone else to witness this. While utilities companies do have the right under the New Roads and Street Works Act to carry out urgent works, it was upsetting to us all to see it happen so soon after the resurfacing, so I’ve since been making enquiries into why Thames Water (TW) needed to carry out works here at this particular time.

I’ve now received a full response from Highways officers... When Highways’ closure notice was submitted, planned works had been checked by a senior Highways officer and nothing had been scheduled by TW on this section of road. During the resurfacing process however, a leak was discovered on the fire hydrant. Instead of leaving it and risking further damage to the newly laid carriageway, Highways asked TW to take action as soon as possible. It was a necessary step to prevent TW from having to return in a few months and potentially cause more disruption and damage.

So why wasn’t TW’s work carried out at the same time as Highways’ work? I’ve been advised that they would not have been able to close off both ends of the road on the same evening. Resident access had to be provided to both Duck Square and Van Diemens side roads, which would not have been possible if all the work had been attempted by both organisations at the same time. Highways had to simply react to the failed section of surface at the Lower Road junction following the winter period.

On Monday 27th April, a senior officer completed the quality assessment of this site with the surfacing contractors and is happy with the standard, though he confirms he’ll be keeping an eye on this road anyway, as there is still more patching work to be completed on Station Road this year.

For reference, the road closure notices I'm aware of for upcoming works in the division are B4009 Aston Rowant 8th – 12th May (surface sealing), Sydenham Road, Sydenham on 8th July (Openreach), Moor Close, Chinnor on 13th July (TW fire hydrant work) and, as I write, the current B4009 Kingston Blount closure for surface dressing.

Further to correspondence over the past few months with parents and parish councils on the **321 and 322 bus services** used by school children, I've been following up on the situation and was disappointed to learn that the 322 service to Icknield Community College has suffered a number of problems since parents first wrote to me, including several occasions in which buses were very late, to the point that some parents had to find last-minute means of collecting their children themselves. The Operations Manager at Red Rose has so far responded as follows:

"I'm sorry to hear about the issues raised and understand the parent's frustration, particularly given the circumstances you've described. I will investigate the concerns outlined in detail and review the service records for the 322 route over the past few months.

I will get back to you as soon as possible with a full response."

With regards to the 321 service to Lord Williams which Sydenham residents had experienced issues with, I understand the service has not suffered disruption however parents have been concerned that there is sometimes only standing room for the children getting on at Sydenham. While this is a commercial service and not a dedicated school service, I appreciate parents' concern about this and approached OCC officers about the legal position. I have received the following advice:

Section 6 of The Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 states that all vehicles used on public passenger transport services must have a Certificate of Initial Fitness (COIF) which will set out its capacity, including standees.

As long as the number of seated and standing passengers on board do not exceed their respective capacities stated on the COIF and as indicated on the vehicle, standing passengers are permitted on vehicles operating public bus services.

Public buses designed for regular service are subject to different rules than dedicated home-to-school provision. There is no restriction on schoolchildren standing on public bus services provided that this is within the stated carrying capacity of the vehicle.

If parents/carers have any concerns that buses to schools are exceeding capacity, please let me know.

I've mentioned in previous reports that I receive a lot of correspondence from residents in **Lower Icknield Way** regarding heavy and speeding traffic. A speed survey was carried out in September 2025, however residents strongly feel that it was not representative of the

current situation. Highways recently agreed to carry out a further speed survey on the same section of road, so the speed situation on this road can be revisited once we have the results.

On **flood project funding** I approached Highways officer Carl Stallwood to request assistance with some expressions of interest from parish councils, and he has been incredibly helpful and encouraging with some potential local projects. My district councillor colleague Ed Sadler recently registered to be a volunteer flood warden for OCC, so he and Carl met up recently to look at some areas of interest in Lewknor and Aston Rowant (and I joined them with Lewknor's parish council chair a few days ago to discuss this particular village project). Expressions of interest close on 4th May and I'm hopeful that there will be several applications from the Chinnor division for this excellent funding opportunity. I'm very grateful to both Carl and Ed for their help and hard work.

It came to my attention recently that some residents have experienced problems with certain members of staff at **Oakley Wood Recycling Centre** being overly zealous in checking residents' items against their completed form. On feeding this back to OCC's manager of the recycling centres, I have received assurance that staff should not be making visitors feel uncomfortable in this way and the problem has been addressed. After all, the aim is to encourage people to recycle, not to put them off using the site!

Just to explain the checklist, information on what wastes customers are bringing is extremely useful, but more importantly selecting DIY wastes (which are chargeable) also provides the means for Oxfordshire residents to claim their weekly free allowance for DIY material. This effectively replaced the old DIY booking system which was in place previously.

While staff do need to make a quick sense-check on arrival (for example, to apply charges where appropriate, identify prohibited waste, and ensure trade waste is not accepted), this should be a relatively quick and straightforward process. In all cases staff should be courteous and respectful at all times.

I understand this has now been addressed by management and there should not be further problems of residents being made to feel uncomfortable about their waste being checked. However, if residents experience anything other than courtesy at this recycling centre, please do let me know.

On other local visits, I was recently invited to spend a morning with the **CCC Mums and Tots** group. I thoroughly enjoyed this opportunity, it was a lovely way to spend a Friday morning! It was important for me to hear what the priorities and concerns are for parents of young children in Chinnor, and I learned that many of the mums who attend have moved to Chinnor and don't have a local support network. Groups like this, which bring people together and extend a hand of friendship, reinforce my view of Chinnor's great community spirit. I'm looking forward to experiencing more of Chinnor's community spirit when I spend some quality time in the village with our MP Freddie van Mierlo in the next few weeks!

Finally, **many thanks to Chinnor PC** for facilitating the first meeting to set up a Traffic Advisory Committee in Chinnor!

Council Matters

I often like to include updates from cabinet members and senior officers in my monthly reports, and I hope you will be interested in the following news from **Clr Tim Bearder, cabinet member for Adult Services**:

“The Director of Adults, Karen Fuller and I were pleased to join Clr Bethia Thomas in Faringdon for the opening of the new Fern Meadows Extra Care housing scheme — a really positive addition to our local care offer, helping residents live independently for longer. I’ve recorded a short video from the visit which you can watch here:

<https://vimeo.com/1183781290/7715ec3837?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

I have also written to Stephen Kinnock raising serious concerns about proposed changes to overseas worker rules and the impact this will have on our already stretched care workforce. As highlighted in my letter, Oxfordshire relies heavily on international staff and there is no domestic workforce available at scale to replace them. Without changes, this risks reducing care capacity at a time of rising demand.”

Withdrawal of fire station closure proposals

Following a public consultation that asked communities to help shape how Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service operates, no fire station closures are now being recommended.

As a result of feedback received by Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service between late October 2025 and January 2026, a proposal is being made to continue focusing on recruitment and community engagement at Eynsham, Henley and Woodstock fire stations. The three fire stations had been considered for closure due to persistent low availability of on-call crews. However, residents’ feedback made it clear how important local fire stations are with communities showing strong support for retaining them.

The main proposal in the public consultation was to address ongoing challenges with fire engine availability during the daytime, when demand and risk are highest. As part of this, the consultation explored proposals to improve daytime fire and emergency response cover across Oxfordshire.

Work will continue to identify how Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service can deliver its key objectives of improved first response times, increased daytime cover, stronger service resilience, and an increased amount of fire prevention work.

Further engagement with employees and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) will take place to help shape how proposals could work in practice.

Cabinet was also asked to agree to withdrawing the proposal presented in the public consultation to remove the second fire engine at Thame fire station. This was put forward based on low availability of crews and because the vehicle had been attending less than 20 incidents a year.

This will allow time to consider consultation feedback alongside similar proposals recently consulted on by Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service, particularly given the proximity of Thame and Haddenham fire stations.

Proposals relating to the building of a new fire station north of Oxford will require further work before any decisions are made. While the long-term potential remains, the proposal is being paused for now due to uncertainty around developer negotiations and the need for further engagement.

Government recognises improved services for Oxfordshire's SEND children

OCC has received news that the government has lifted the improvement notice for services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), issued following a local area partnership inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in 2023. On 15th April, Oxfordshire County Council and NHS Thames Valley Integrated Care Board received a letter from The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education, recognising ongoing improvements in services for Oxfordshire's SEND children.

The secretary of state noted that Oxfordshire's local area partnership (LAP)* has strengthened how the views of children and young people with SEND, as well as parents and carers, are gathered and used in strategic planning.

There have been improvements in communication and information sharing across the partnership, including monitoring the impact of the partnership's actions and enhanced timeliness of education and health care plans (EHCPs).

The secretary of state also acknowledged significant progress in jointly commissioning services and reducing waiting times for critical support.

Councillor Sean Gaul, Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Young People's Services, said: "The government's decision to remove the improvement notice is encouraging. Close partnership working has helped us to review, reset and rebuild services.

“The government does, quite rightly, expect the services and support we collectively provide to keep getting better. We are committed to this and will continue to engage and listen to children, young people with SEND and their families as part of our improvement journey.”

*The LAP includes Oxfordshire County Council; NHS Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (formerly NHS Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board); Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust; Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust; Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum; and professional subject matter leads.