

# **Oxfordshire Together**

Giving communities control over local services

## **The Model**

March 2016

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## 1. Deputy Leader's Foreword

Active communities are one of Oxfordshire's greatest strengths, and community groups, as well as town and parish councils play an increasingly significant role in shaping and improving their local areas.

In Oxfordshire we have an impressive number of voluntary and community groups that deliver an incredibly wide range of projects and activities.



I am so proud of our communities, many of which are already doing so much to maintain the beauty of their local area and improve the lives of their residents. As Cabinet Member for the Voluntary and Community Sector, I am truly passionate about giving communities even more power, so that they feel confident about taking ownership of local priorities.

Over the past few years we have shifted our focus from being mainly a provider of services, to being an enabler, committed to creating the right environment for communities to be able to do things for themselves about issues that matter locally. As the size of the public sector is shrinking, we will rely even more on our communities to drive local development and design local solutions.

In September 2015 we launched the initial conversation with communities under the Oxfordshire Together programme, and I was much encouraged to see that a high number of communities have come forward to express an interest in delivering open access community services. This shows, once again, what vibrant and resourceful communities we have across the county.

Over the next months and years I hope to work closely with parishes, towns and community groups to develop practical and efficient solutions that will have a lasting impact on the lives of the people of Oxfordshire. If you have any ideas about how we might deliver things better in our communities, please get in touch with me and let's work together!

**March 2016**

**Councillor Rodney Rose**

*Deputy Leader of Oxfordshire County Council*

## 2. Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council is looking at alternative ways in which we can deliver a number of different open access public services, across a wide range of areas. We have already been working with local communities in a number of areas to deliver services such as: grass cutting, youth provision and libraries. Enabling local communities to deliver services has meant that they can shape, design and tailor the services to meet their local needs.

The Oxfordshire Together proposal highlights the potential for the county council to work more closely with town and parish councils and voluntary and community groups, and seeks to identify further opportunities to enable us to reshape the way that public services are delivered in the future. There is an assumption that 'one size does not fit all' and therefore there will be a differentiated approach in each community.

The *Local Government Act 1972* – section 136 allows principal local authorities to pay grants to local councils in respect of concurrent functions, while section 101 allows one local authority to arrange for its functions to be discharged by another (this being further supported by section 20 of the Local Government Act 2000, which permits the joint exercise of functions).

Local voluntary and community groups can take on responsibility for the delivery of open access services in their local area.

The services identified in our [Highway Services](#) offer were the first tranche that the county council felt could be delivered more cost effectively at a local level. We are now extending our offer to [open access services](#) that can be delivered from some of our buildings in communities across the county. The proposal is flexible and the county council welcomes feedback on how the initial proposals could be adapted to suit local needs. The list is not intended to be finite and other suggestions are welcomed.

## 3. Benefits

Oxfordshire Together provides an opportunity for communities to redesign the way public services are planned and delivered, and to find radical new solutions to not only deliver better value for money, but also better local services more tailored to local needs.

Delivering more locally has many benefits for communities, including:

- **Improved quality of service:** communities are likely to 'go the extra mile' to deliver a high quality of service;
- **Increased service provision:** enhancing the current service provision through reduced costs;
- **A more responsive service:** local service delivery has the ability to respond more quickly to problems and resolve complaints;

- **Increased satisfaction:** improved quality and responsiveness will mean communities are more satisfied with the service they receive;
- **Generation of local employment opportunities:** this approach has the potential to help create local employment for local residents, particularly for those who may have been out of employment for a while or for adults with learning disabilities. Funding may be available at a national level to help create local employment/enterprise schemes;
- **Increased pride in the local area:** communities will feel that they have greater control over local delivery and will be more likely to become involved in service delivery;
- **More local decision making:** communities will have more control over how the local budget is allocated;
- **Opportunity to trade services:** where services are delivered locally they could be offered out to local households/businesses to generate additional income;
- **Ownership of the local environment:** service provision can be tailored to take into account environmental needs.

### 3.1. Alternative funding opportunities

There are many advantages to delivering services locally including seeking alternative sources of funding not traditionally available to the county council including:

- Attracting private investment
- Attracting community investment
- Crowd funding
- Community shares
- Increasing the precept
- Realigning resources to meet changing priorities

Other longer term benefits can arise from the creation of social enterprises, utilisation of community assets and increasing learning and skills.

## 4. The Approach

To enable this proposal to achieve the desired economies of scale, it is advisable that town and parish councils and community groups cluster together or set up partnerships to undertake delivery of services at a local level.

### 4.1. Glossary of terms

*Cluster* – a group of town and/or parish councils or community group that come together to share the provision of services within the scope of the Oxfordshire Together offer.

*Cluster lead* – a local council or community group within a cluster that delivers the provision of services for the surrounding town and parish councils and/or partner organisations.

*Service Lead* – A group that delivers the service for surrounding areas or an individual town or parish council or community group.

## **4.2. Cluster model**

The clustering of parishes, towns and community groups enables a more cost effective approach for a number of reasons:

- It is the best way for the county council to effectively coordinate the arrangements;
- Clusters enable communities to share resources and make the best use of their expertise;
- Clusters can enable larger town councils/parishes or organisations to deliver services to smaller councils or community groups who do not have the resources to manage service delivery;
- Clusters empower communities to identify the most suitable form of service delivery for their local area;
- Clusters enable sharing of effort; one group may lead on some service provision while another may lead on others;
- Clusters will ensure that smaller parishes or community groups still benefit from these arrangements;
- Cluster models could fit very well with the introduction of local social enterprise schemes.

Oxfordshire County Council is not seeking to determine how clusters of town and parish councils or of community groups can deliver services. We would like to see communities form clusters which will decide the best form of service delivery for that area.

## **4.3. The individual model**

Oxfordshire County Council is happy to consult with individual town or parish councils and community or voluntary organisations that would like to deliver services for their area only. These requests will need to be considered on an individual basis depending on the viability and sustainability of the model.

## **5. Delivery Models**

Clusters could choose from options including: a larger town council or community group delivering services within the area using their own employees; a parish council or community group delivering services through a community interest company which is training and employing local people for this purpose; and a parish council or community group commissioning commercial subcontractors.

## 5.1. Use of volunteers

Another way to deliver some of the proposed services is through volunteers. This could be done on an individual basis if one person had a key interest in providing a particular service or it could be undertaken by a group of volunteers overseen by a central co-ordinator. Training may be required to enable the individual/s to perform some tasks in a safe manner.

## 5.2. Alternative delivery methods

Alternative delivery methods such as local social enterprise schemes or local community schemes that potentially support adults with learning disabilities, unemployed local residents or persons with disabilities are encouraged by the county council. This would enable local residents to learn new skills through a training programme to assist with the delivery of services such as urban grass cutting or sign /small street furniture cleaning. There is funding available from both national and local organisations to assist with set up and on-going costs. Oxfordshire County Council will happily assist where it can to help communities set up such schemes that will benefit the area that the services are being delivered in.

## 5.3. Case studies

Attached to this document are case studies highlighting the different models that are being used elsewhere, including an example of a town council delivering services and a parish council contracting a social enterprise company. Further case studies are available on our website at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether).

## 6. Monitoring

The county council will not manage the performance or delivery of the services. Any public enquiries about the quality of service delivered within the new arrangement would be routed directly to the town, parish, community group or cluster lead.

## 7. Further Information

For detailed information about funding, agreements periods and operation requirements for the services in scope please consult our [Transitional Offer of Highway Services Booklet](#) and the Children's Services Community Initiative Booklet published on our website at: [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshiretogether).

If you have any queries which have not been addressed here or on the website, please contact us: [localities@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:localities@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

## 8. Case Studies

### Henley-on-Thames Town Council

Henley-on-Thames 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. They are also delivering a range of other services for the benefit of the community:

- Snow clearing
- Gritting
- Removal of illegal flyposting
- Maintenance of bus shelters
- Maintenance of street furniture
- Weed spraying



#### How are these services funded?

The town council funds the services traditionally paid for by Oxfordshire County Council through its own precept. It also relies on income raised from fees and charges as well as donations from organisations such as Henley in Bloom. It has used its small amount of funding from the county council to help with this, and in particular to purchase and maintain equipment.

Moreover, some of the work is carried out by volunteers. For example, Gardening Buddies, a community group, help plant the flower beds on some of the feature highway verges along the main roads into town. This results not only in a better environment, but also helps support more community benefits.

#### A win – win relationship

Henley-on-Thames Town Council contracts out all their legal work to Oxfordshire County Council. The county council provides a faster and more efficient legal support service at vastly reduced prices compared to commercial solicitors. Moreover, talks are underway about relocating the county council's Henley registry office into the town hall and sharing facilities for civil weddings.

The town council has recently commissioned a comprehensive traffic study of the town, traditionally a county council responsibility, and has a dedicated budget for traffic calming measures. This puts the local community in direct control whilst still working alongside the county council, often resulting in more responsive services delivering local needs.



*'The days of criticising the county council and expecting them to deliver all the services because traditionally it's been their responsibility to do so, are a thing of the past. We must work together to provide excellent services for our residents.'*

Mike Kennedy  
Town Clerk, Henley-on-Thames Town Council

## Stewkley Parish Council

Stewkley Village in Buckinghamshire has pioneered a new way of delivering community services by entering into an agreement with Buckinghamshire County Council to undertake a number of village maintenance services including:

- Urban grass cutting
- Grass trimming
- Minor footways clearance
- Fly poster removal
- Public rights of way clearance
- Verge maintenance
- Serving Hedge Cutting Notices
- Weed spraying
- Minor hedge trimming
- Drain rodding
- Road sign clearing



*Stewkley residents responsible for mowing the designated highway verges*

The service is now delivered by the Stewkley Community Enterprise Agency, which is a not-for-profit social enterprise launched in October 2012.

### What are the benefits for the community?

Under the agreement the Stewkley Enterprise Agency, in partnership with Stewkley Parish Council and Buckinghamshire County Council, employs six part-time staff to undertake a range of village maintenance tasks. Team members complete between 80 – 90 hours per year.

This approach means that local residents have the opportunity to earn a small income within the village. This reduces the need for transport and helps strengthen the residents' ties with their community.

Most of the staff are young men and women who gain valuable work experience while also contributing to their local community. They also benefit from learning new skills such as how to invoice, schedule their work and manage their time, collect customer feedback, work on the road side, conduct health and safety risk assessments, use and maintain tools and to work as a team.

One of the members of the team has been suffering from the medical condition ME (also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome) for the past few years and wished to work because he felt that it would help him with his rehabilitation. Another older person joined because he was new to the village and felt this would help him meet other people and provides a way to supplement his income.

The younger members of the team, some as young as 16 and 17-years old, further benefit by being able to include their participation in an innovative community service in their educational personal statements. They also acquired an appreciation of the opportunity and value of part-time work, which can be difficult to find when living in a village away from traditional urban part-time roles.

### Other key benefits include:

- Higher quality standards and an improved environment for all residents to enjoy;
- Close, positive and proactive working relationships between the parish council and other neighbouring parishes, local authorities and community groups;
- More people volunteering because a greater number of opportunities are available.



Image by: Visual Minutes

### What is a community enterprise?

A community enterprise is an organisation trading for social purposes with profits reinvested rather than going to shareholders. A community enterprise provides benefits to a particular local neighbourhood or community of identity. It is owned and run by members of that community, and it is usually managed by a volunteer coordinator.

Community enterprises come in all shapes and forms and range from resident-run shops to pop-up broadband schemes and community woodlands that sell products and provide training and employment to local people.

They share the following characteristics:

- The enterprise is community-led, meaning it is endorsed by, or engaging directly with, local people;
- The enterprise is locally based, benefiting a specific geographical place, and is inclusive of all in the community;
- The aims and objectives of the enterprise are a direct response to local social and economic need or opportunity;
- The enterprise has a sustainable business plan and aims to become viable beyond grants or public funding;

Useful tips on setting up and running a community enterprise are available at: [www.locality.org.uk/projects/power-change/community-enterprise-checker/](http://www.locality.org.uk/projects/power-change/community-enterprise-checker/).

## Social Street



There are countless ways vibrant communities help people live better lives. Having neighbours to borrow the proverbial cup of sugar from is not only a way to share resources more effectively, but a great way to see the community transformed into a powerful resource in its own right. Guided by this vision, Social Street was launched to increase opportunities for meaningful community interaction through self-organising groups.

### What is Social Street?

Social Street provides a platform for residents in the same street to build relationships, share expertise and local knowledge, and implement projects of common interest. To achieve this at no cost, Social Street uses Facebook groups to interact, but the focus is on using the group to achieve tangible benefits for the members of the community. The first Social Street was launched by a group of residents in the Italian city of Bologna and the successful model has now been replicated in over 60 communities worldwide.

### How can I set up a Social Street for my community?

#### Step 1: Create a Closed Group on Facebook

Create a closed group to protect the privacy of your members and potentially encourage higher sign-up rates. This can be done using the group settings when you create your Facebook group, but remember: people before pixels! **The use of an online network should encourage offline interaction, not just end at the digital level.**

To be found among the other Facebook groups that are a part of Social Street, be sure to use the proper name convention for your group: "Residents of [street name (or square, neighborhood, etc.)] - city - social street." (e.g. "Residents of Botley Road, Oxford – Social Street")

Form a small board that can help feed content, manage comments, and lead the conversation into actionable plans and events.

#### Step 2: Advertise the Group

Print out copies of a poster that includes the details of your Facebook group, encouraging people to join. Post copies in a variety of highly visible places such as parks, schools, community notice boards and the village hall.

### **Step 3: Manage the Group**

There shouldn't be just one person in charge. Everyone should have the ability to participate and engage in the online group's activities, but there should be a smaller group that helps grow the conversation and organise some small actions around the comments and conversations that are happening. You can set a couple of administrators for your Facebook group who can approve new members, coordinate conversations within the group and stop inappropriate comments.

### **Step 4: Step into the Street**

Once you have engaged a small group of interested neighbours, you are ready for your Social Street. Guide people based on their interests to plan and organise a public event involving all group members as a first 'get to know you.' Make the event open for other people to join in as well. Keep the conversations going and use the group as a forum to plan the next meetings and activities.

### **How can I use the Social Street group?**

There are endless possibilities for using your Social Street group to bring your neighbours closer together. For example you could use it to:

- Share local news (e.g. new opening times of your local Post Office)
- Ask for help or offer your help to others
- Check on your frail or vulnerable neighbours
- Raise an issue and find solutions together
- Start a club
- Organise a community event

### **What about those who do not have Internet or a Facebook account?**

Even those without a Facebook account or who are simply not Internet-savvy can enjoy the benefits of Social Streets. For example, if a larger event is organised such as a community meal or a voluntary litter picking event, this can be advertised using leaflets or posters displayed in a prominent place.

### **Useful tips for a successful Social Street**

- Select a clearly demarcated area: Opt for a smaller (or at least manageable) area so that you're truly encouraging 'street-level' exchanges that can be relevant to local residents' daily lives and needs;
- Keep it free: Setting up and managing a Facebook group is free of charge. All the activities organised by the group should be free and open to all.
- Inclusion: Focus on what brings people together, not on what divides them. Stay open-minded and consider even your harshest critic's point of view – it's important not to isolate yourself from constructive criticism. Use (and encourage the use of) inclusive, non-discriminatory language.