Annual report to the Faringdon Town Council from County Councillor Judith Heathcoat

Monday 13 April 2015

It has been another challenging and busy year, both with the volume and diversity of workload and the financial challenges that Oxfordshire County Council has and continues to face. I have given you a list of the meetings I attend together with a “snap shot” of Adult Social Services Care which is my Cabinet Portfolio at County Hall. I do write a monthly County Councillor’s report which is circulated to all the Parish Councils in my Division and I also undertake a monthly surgery in the Faringdon Library I hope therefore that you feel that you are up to date with what has been happening at County Hall over all?

I have undertaken since April 2014 over 285 meetings plus visits across the County and attended various conferences. I have driven over 7500 miles on county council business but, I do try to share lifts wereever possible! I have of course additionally my Parish Council meetings (Faringdon, Littleworth, Buckland, Lt. Coxwell, Gt. Coxwell, Buscot, Coleshill, Eaton Hastings ( has no Parish Meeting but I do liaise with their Chairman – Mr Aubrey Cole by email).

I have attended the annual 3-day conference for the Association of Directors Adult Social Care/LGA in Manchester there are some 850-1000 elected members who attend this event. It’s good to network with other councillors and their officers. This year 5 Ministers attended and all of the sessions were very well attended.

1. The local “Hearsay” conference - which I opened is for carers, people with sensory handicaps, Physical and Learning Disabilities and senior officers from Adult Social Care – Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxfordshire Clinical Commission Group for Health attend. This conference is where we hear views regarding the service people receive.
2. “My Life My Choice” – is a superb trust, supported by OCC for people with a range of disabilities – they run their own café, and their own radio station – I am to be a guest on their show in April. Once a year Age UK host a training day on behalf of OCC both for social carers and for those in receipt of care, this last year’s conference was held at Unipart. It really is heart-warming to see how families and individuals cope with various disabilities. I opened this event and sat on a panel to take questions from the floor.
3. The last conference in January this year was at the Kassam Stadium where the commissioned providers of care services to OCC attended to give their critical views on residential care/central government cutbacks/Adult Social Care and Health. I opened this conference and the providers of care were critical of the amount of monies OCC pay them. I’d like to advise that OCC pays £19 per hour for home care and is in the top 5 authorities for the amount we pay. Most authorities pay between £11-£15 per hour.
4. Age UK organised a conference commissioned by OCC at Unipart, the subject matter was Dementia/Alzheimers and individual suffers and their carers attended. I found this particular conference very heart/thought provoking.

My Cabinet and OCC attendance at meetings:-

Full Member of Cabinet but of course also represent my Portfolio for Adult Social Care this meets monthly

Full Member of Informal Cabinet – this meets fortnightly

Cabinet Member taking Delegated Decisions for Adult Social Care – monthly, or as required.

Chairman – Older Peoples Joint Management Group – a quarterly meeting

Chairman – Learning Disability – Commissioning and finance – a monthly meeting

Member of Health Liaison Committee – has been quarterly, or as required

Member – Health and Wellbeing Board - quarterly

Member of Oxfordshire Safeguard Adults Board – quarterly

Member – Shared Lives Panel - quarterly

Member – Adults Services Improvement Programme - quarterly

Member of Oxfordshire Care Partnership - quarterly

Member of A420 working party – as required

Invitee to Older Peoples’ Partnership Board – as required

Invitee to “My Life My Choice” – twice a year

Invitee to Health Improvement Board – as required

Invitee to Physical Disabilities Partnership Board – as invited

Cabinet invitee to Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – attend quarterly

Board Member, The Orders of St John Trust - quarterly

Deputised for the Leader of Council at Corporate Induction events to new staff – as required

Full Council – meetings quarterly

Cabinet Member’s Delegated Decisions – I have deputised for my colleagues in the last 12 months on 4 occasions

Chairman – Oxfordshire Thames Valley Fire Control Scheme

Chairman – Junior Citizens Trust

Governor – Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust - quarterly

Governor – Oxford University Health Trust – this is in shadow format currently so meeting monthly

My Commissioning involvement for Adult Social Care,OCCl

Commissioning for Community Information Networks – Age UK Oxfordshire

Commissioning – “Carers Oxfordshire”

Commissioning – “Healthwatch”

Commissioning - Hearsay

Commissioning – Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

Commissioning – Style Acres

Commissioning – Community Information Networks – Age UK Oxford

Member of Faringdon Educational Activities Trust

Chairman – Faringdon Area Traffic Advisory Committee

I have monthly briefing sessions with senior officers for Adult Social Care plus 1:1 meetings with individual officers on a monthly basis.

Of course I receive invites in both my role as Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and as an Oxfordshire County Councillor. I have undertaken in the last 12-months 8 radio interviews, 4 TV interviews and I’ve appeared on the Sunday Politics Show.

I have visited facilities across the County – Tier 2 and 3 Health and Wellbeing Centres/Day Centres for people with Learning and Physical Disabilities and also for older people. The day centre in Bicester has many activities for those attending, cake making, physical exercise, card and domino playing plus gardening. The centre in Wantage for young people with Learning and Physical Disabilities is light and airy and this centre is supported by both OCC and Style Acre. Sam Cameron’s work here is just superb – the young people are “educated” in different skills eg vegetable growing from seed and then they have the skills to get employment. It really is heart-warming to see young people with chronic disabilities managing to garden from their wheelchairs. I have visited this centre now on several occasions and I’m known as “missy councillor”. Some conversations are hard, but others are easy – some just want to hold your hand and know that someone is close by. We have started an innovative project of “supportive living” in the County and at the Wantage day centre there are a group of youngsters who live together with help on hand 24/7 if needed. This means that they become independent of their families and gain privacy. Many of the young people say to me “I just want to be normal and treated like everyone else is”.

Financially OCC has experienced sustained reductions in Government funding combined with the pressure to restrict Council Tax increases this has resulted in a significant squeeze on Council resources. It is to be remembered that County Council is “capped” and cannot increase council tax above 1.99% whereas Parish Councils are not “capped” so are free to increase the annual tax base they fell necessary. In 2010 OCC started a programme of reducing the budget by £201m. The spending review announcement in the summer of 2013 meant we had to find an additionally £64m of savings. By the end of this financial year March 2015 we will have achieved £265m of savings. With the added pressures from Adults Social Care (my own Cabinet Portfolio and Children’s services), this takes the total savings from £265m to £292m. The pressures on the Adult Social Care Budget, my Portfolio will have delivered saving of £47m by the end of 2014/15 whilst meeting more demand for care.

My Cabinet Portfolio has to ensure that OCC meets its statutory duty to meet the needs of older, disabled and vulnerable people and their carers – this includes older people, adults with learning disabilities, adults with mental health problems and those with physical and sensory impairments. Social care needs are in summary, activities of daily living, personal care such as going to the toilet, help with bathing and eating and in some circumstances with help with occupation and activities during the day (for example for young adults who may require access to training and employment). Access to support is normally through a professional assessment of need, guided by nationally set eligibility criteria.

I have to ensure as do the Director and Deputy Directors that OCC fulfils its statutory duty and continues to meet individuals eligibility needs. With the budgetary strain – to a great degree Adult Social Care has been protected from the savage cuts that have been made in other areas of the County Council Services. It must be remembered that 50% of the Council’s budget is spent on 2% of the population – Adults and Children. There are more people coming into Adult Social Care, more children surviving with complex health needs transferring into our care, more people living much longer again with very complex health needs and there is movement into the County with people moving here for employment and our expert health provision in Oxford.

We are challenged by the response required to the implementation of the Care Act – as there is no new money on the table – Central Government is redistributing the monies from Health. However, Oxfordshire County Council is in a good place as the cost of responding to the Care Act will be significantly less than the grant provided due to the LEAN processes (a management tool) and self-service assessment through the delivery of a new IT system). I believe that the Care Act has much good within it but, I am concerned about “unintended consequences”. We are one of the lowest funded authorities by Central Government eg. Hackney received £1091 per head of population and Oxfordshire received £285. Statistically, Oxfordshire has a higher proportion of elderly people to Hackney. Equally, Health is also the lowest funded authority.

General note for OCC in the last year:-

* 34,000 potholes have been filled
* 11,000 social care clients assessed
* 12,000 primary and secondary school places allocated
* 3,200 trading standards complaints investigated
* 2,000,000 school meals served
* 20,000 health checks completed
* 3,700 smokers helped to quit
* 12,000 emergency calls to the Fire and Rescue Service
* 300,000 tonnes of municipal waste safely disposed of – OCC is the waste authority – District collect and then much is being in the “energy from waste plant” –use of landfill is reducing
* 17,500 births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships registered

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