

## **County Council report 2009-10**

I reported last year that we are living in a time when the economy has become increasingly uncertain. There are restrictions on Central Government funding for Councils. Oxfordshire County Council gets Central Government funding for capital projects through a bidding process. This is for schools rebuilding through the Building Schools for the Future programme, Highways, Social Services, Libraries and Community Safety. This is still the case, and will be so for a number of years.

The County Council is the largest employer in Oxfordshire, and has a turnover just short of £1 billion. Including teachers, we employ 22,000 dedicated staff. With that comes the responsibility of having to carry out the services we are statutorily required to deliver. But the County Council has, over the years, funded additional projects. All these are coming under the spotlight. Savings in the order of £105 million over 5 years have to be made, despite more being required of the County Council by central government. This will be by way of yet further efficiencies and reviewing the way we deliver services.

We are continuing to work closely with the District Council about refuse collection and waste disposal and with the residents about recycling. Space at the landfill sites is running out, and the County is looking at different ways of dealing with waste. In the last year, the Recycling Facility at Oakley Wood has been transformed. This now makes it easier and more inviting to use. The amount of recycling has increased considerably.

Like a number of County and Borough Councils, our Transport Department was seriously stretched in December and January in dealing with the ice & snow – not helped by the salt supplier reneging on their contract. Followed by the resulting potholes, which will take time to be fully dealt with.

The speed of traffic on the local roads remains continuing concern, despite the statutory road signs, speed cameras and flashing signs. The County, in conjunction with the Police, carry out speed checks, but the Police alone can prosecute. Regular reviews of the legal speed limits are carried out, and changes are being made in some of the rural areas.

We have some of the best attaining schools in the County. But we can do better. The County has restructured the Education Department, and will be able to give better support to our teachers – and improve the quality of teaching throughout the County as a whole. The quality of the schools buildings remains of serious concern, but capital money comes from the Government – and so patch & mend will continue whilst we continue to lobby for more capital money.

The Government is imposing a significant increase in housing provision in the County. My County Council Division is not, like Bicester, Didcot and Abingdon, a growth area. But there will be development pressures in Henley and the Chilterns. These will require to be dealt with sensitively, to ensure that a balance is struck between the viability and the rural aspect of the villages.

D Nimmo Smith  
2 April 2010