

Oxfordshire Together

Giving communities control over local services

The Model

September 2015

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1. Leader's Foreword

The continuing financial pressure on local government means Oxfordshire County Council still has to save more money.

We have already announced savings that will have a big impact on local communities, such as children's centres and subsidised transport.



Over time, we hope more responsibilities will be taken on by communities. People know what is important for their area, and local communities are often able to provide services themselves.

So although there is no point pretending that there is no financial motive for thinking about services could be run by local communities, I also think there are real opportunities.

To ensure our county continues to thrive, I want to start a discussion with parish and town councils, with local community groups and new organisations that might spring up. I'd like to work with you to consider how services the county council can no longer afford to provide could continue in local communities.

I know this is easier to say than do, but I am up for finding real, practical solutions and I hope you are too. Let's work together.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth
Leader of Oxfordshire County Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Hudspeth'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

2. Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council is looking at alternative ways in which we can deliver a number of different 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.

This proposal highlights the potential for the county council to work more closely with all town and parish councils, 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).

The services identified in the Transitional Offer of Highway Services Booklet are the first tranche that the county council feels can be delivered more cost effectively at a local level. 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

This is 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.

Services delivered locally can have the following benefits:

- **Improved quality of service:** towns and parishes 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 area 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 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.

4. The Approach

To enable this proposal to achieve the desired economies of scale, it would be preferential for town and parish councils (or clusters of councils) to undertake delivery of services at a local level.

4.1. Glossary of terms

Cluster – a group of town and/or parish councils that come together to share the provision of services within scope of this document.

Cluster lead – a group within a cluster that delivers the provision of services for the surrounding town and parish councils.

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

4.2. Cluster model

The clustering of parishes and towns enables a more cost effective approach for the following reasons:

- It is the best way for the county council to effectively coordinate the arrangements;
- Clusters enable towns and parishes to share resources;
- Clusters can enable larger town councils/parishes to deliver services to smaller parishes who do not have the resources to manage service delivery;
- Clusters empower parishes to identify the most suitable form of service delivery for their local area;
- Clusters enable sharing of effort; one parish may lead on some service provision while another may lead on others;
- Clusters will ensure that smaller parishes 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 can deliver services. We would like to see town and parish councils 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 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.

4.4. Support for town and parish councils

Details to be agreed following engagement with town and parish councils.

5. Example Delivery Models

Clusters could choose from options including: a larger town council delivering services within the town and in neighbouring parishes using their own employees, a parish council delivering services through a community interest company which is training and employing local people for this purpose, and a parish council 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 parish and town councils 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.

6. Funding

Every town and parish would receive an offer of an annual budget based on the service delivery they have opted to undertake. The county council are open to discussions about the best way to allocate the available funding, although the total budget will not be increased.

Where discussions identify unusual costs or particular challenges we would like to work through the best way to solve them with each parish. We recognise that some areas may require some additional initial funding to resolve such issues. This may include the agreement for some initial start-up funding.

6.1. Alternative funding benefits

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
- Attract 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.

7. Agreement Periods

To allow for town and parish councils to establish service delivery models, each service would provide a funding guarantee, the proposal being three years initially. Each service would then set the review period for future allocations.

8. Operational Requirements

8.1. Responsibility

The county council are looking to hand responsibility for the services identified to the town and parish councils. However we will seek to establish alternative local delivery solutions wherever possible should a service fail.

The town or parish that is delivering a service will adhere to a minimum standard of service delivery; however, beyond this it is up to them how they determine service delivery. Towns and parishes will have a formal role in quality and quantity of service provision.

Town and parish councils are under no obligation to take on a service delegation but if they are unsure they are advised to seek legal advice.

8.2. Insurance

The town, parish or cluster lead should inform its insurers of its involvement in the scheme and providers will be required to put in place a £10 million public liability indemnity and a minimum of £5 million employer's liability insurance. Where a service contract is used, the operative should also have this level of indemnity. There may be exceptions to this rule if works are being undertaken away from a public highway for activities such as weed spraying on parts of the highway that don't require traffic management. Local agreements will be issued to town and parish councils prior to the roll out of this proposal with greater levels of detail surrounding insurance, minimum standards and legal responsibilities.

Service providers will be responsible for creating method statements and risk assessment of all activities and ensuring that all mitigation measures arising from the risk assessments are in place. OCC will help create these documents for parish or town councils if they need assistance.

Further information on insurance requirements will be provided after the initial launch event.

8.3. Health and safety

Service deliverers are required to follow their own health and safety arrangements. Service leads and town/parish councils will be responsible for ensuring that their operatives work in a safe and appropriate manner at all times, whilst adhering to any relevant legislation or best working practices.

If a service is not able to be undertaken safely then the work will revert to Oxfordshire County Council for completion and the funding for that given service will be recovered.

8.4. Equipment

Service leads can use the budget to buy or hire equipment to enable them to deliver the devolved services if there is a need to do so. This equipment must be maintained to the manufacturer's specified recommendations.

8.5. Training

The county council is prepared to offer training in some areas of the transition to assist with business continuity. This will be determined on an individual basis.

8.6. 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 or cluster lead.

9. Frequently Asked Questions

9.1. Cluster arrangements

Q. What if different parishes in a cluster require different standards?

A. All clusters will be required to meet the minimum standards. If different parishes within a cluster require different delivery standards (for example, a different numbers of grass cuts) then that can be agreed within the cluster.

Q. Would there be opportunities for the county council to broker/facilitate discussions about cluster formation?

A. Yes. Where clusters do not naturally establish themselves, we are prepared to support discussions.

Q. What happens if the cluster approach fails? What happens if a parish within a cluster pulls out?

A. We will look to establish alternative local delivery solutions where a task that has a statutory responsibility attached to it is not undertaken.

9.2. General

Q. Is the county council just trying to save money at parish and town council's expense?

A. No. We do however believe that the delivery of services by a cluster lead can be undertaken in a more cost effective method.

Q. What can the money be spent on?

A. A minimum standard of service delivery is expected for most services, however beyond these minimum standards the money may be spent as the town or parish chooses.

Q. How will the budget be allocated?

A. Where there are budgets available these will be similar to those that we would spend if the services were not delivered at a local level.

Q. Who will the budget be paid to?

A. Each parish can decide where the money is paid as a single amount to each individual or cluster lead.

Q. What happens in an area that is not parished?

A. The Local Government Act 1972 section 136 allows us to pay grants to local councils for its functions to be discharged by another council. This excludes non parished areas from this proposal.

9.3. Operational details

Q. What level of Public Liability Insurance will a cluster/operative require?

A. Clusters and parishes will need to arrange Public Liability Insurance of £10 million (minimum) and Employers' Liability Insurance of £5 million (minimum). Advice and quotes should be obtained from your insurance broker.

Q. What are the statutory elements of this devolution?

A. Parish clusters will adhere to a minimum standard of service delivery; however, beyond this it is up to them how they determine service delivery.

Q. Who is liable in the event of an incident?

A. We are asking parishes to have full responsibility, although the county council will remain as the enforcement authority. Under devolution legislation, Oxfordshire County Council remains the principal authority and our statutory functions remain, however, we will seek to devolve liability for certain functions (services). Town and parish councils are under no obligation to take on service devolution but if they are unsure they are advised to seek legal advice.

9.4. Questions about the future

Q. What other services will be in scope for this service delivery model?

A. The council is considering all its options and is open to discussions and suggestions of services which the towns and parishes may wish to undertake.

10. Further Information

There is more information available on our website at:

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

11. 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/.

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.