

District Councillor Update – 3 May 2022

Cllr Jo Robb, Cllr Lorraine Hillier

Homes for Ukraine

SODC have redeployed staff to ensure Ukrainian refugees moving to the district get the support and help that they need. South Oxfordshire is one of the top councils nationally in terms of welcoming Ukrainian refugees, and the top council in Oxfordshire, with more than 200 households becoming hosts to more than 500 guests.

Please note, if you or a resident has applied to become a host and know the exact date of your guests' arrival, or your guests have arrived and you are yet to be contacted please let me know or email communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk so that your case can be escalated and the support put in place.

Please also direct hosts or guests to the central website: [Ukraine | Oxfordshire County Council](#) or the Oxfordshire Ukraine helpline: +44 1865 966 444 (opening hours 8.45am-5pm, Monday-Friday). You can also email: ukraineresponse@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Accommodation

The majority of the accommodation visits across the county have now either been carried out or booked in – the availability of hosts over Easter has played a part here.

The number of properties being rejected for overcrowding or poor housing conditions remains very low in every district. There are a small number of partially approved properties that are waiting for improvements. The number of properties where guests have arrived before the accommodation visit takes place is also very low. We will continue to book in visits for new host properties that enter the system over the next few weeks.

Schools

School places are being found for Ukrainian children. Applications for school places from guests are being considered alongside all other applications but the county council is working hard to ensure that places are offered as close as possible to where guests are living. Additional admissions staff have been recruited to help speed the process up.

We recognise that schools provide significant wrap around support to all children and are often the first port of call for identifying welfare concerns, so we are encouraging hosts and guests to register the Ukrainian children in their care for school places as soon as possible once they have arrived in Oxfordshire.

The county council has also written to the headteachers of all schools, reminding them of their responsibility to provide free school meals for any Ukrainian children that are placed with them. Officers will contact any individual schools where issues are identified to resolve these quickly.

Health

The government has recently published some [guidance](#) to help primary health care professionals assess and address the health needs of Ukrainian guests. Councillors may find some of the insight shared within this guidance helpful in understanding more about our guests.

SODC is to provide Bed and Breakfast accommodation in certain cases; we will now use capital funds to acquire property that can be used instead, with a targeted saving of £65,000 a year. The budget assigned £5 million from developer contributions (Section 106) for the purchase of housing for social rent.

Revenue Grants for Voluntary Sector Organisations

Voluntary organisations in South Oxfordshire whose work includes supporting young people, providing vital help and advice for residents, and protecting the environment have been awarded £667,992 in grant funding.

South Oxfordshire District Council awarded the funds to 22 organisations to help them improve the quality of life for the residents and communities they serve, whilst making sustainable plans for their future work.

Environmental charities including Earth Trust and River Thame Conservation Trust.

All applications for the grant were asked to consider how their organisation, activities and services are working towards addressing the climate emergency – a key priority as set out in our Corporate Plan.

Supporting vulnerable residents is also a focus of the funding, with local information and advice services awarded funds. Riverside Counselling, a charity based in Henley, with services also in Wallingford, Didcot and Berinsfield, were awarded £45,568 to help them provide counselling services to adults and young people from the age of 12. Thomley Hall Ltd in Thame, a charity for children and families with autism and complex needs, received £70,000 from the grant scheme.

Henley Toilet Refurbishment

The refurbishment of the public lavatories in the Greys Road carpark has been completed. The £145,000 project was funded with developer money and includes a “space to change” – a specially designed area with wheelchair accessible toilet, height adjustable adult-sized changing bench and hoist. There are now three new separate toilets – a ladies-only toilet and two unisex facilities. There is also a welfare area for carpark inspectors and a storage area.

Update – Electric Vehicle Charing in SODC-owned carparks

Unfortunately, due to the global shortage of semi-conductors, the opening of the electric vehicle charging points in the SODC-owned carparks has been delayed. I have requested that wherever possible, the fencing be removed to enable people to park in these spaces whilst we await the arrival of the parts required for the chargers. The officer has requested the contractors remove the fencing to enable parking where it is safe to do so. I will keep you updated.

Performance management Report for SODC- Q3 2021

Please find the latest published performance management report for SODC around the 6 Corporate Plan objectives:

<https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/03/Quarterly-Report-South-Q3-V5-draft-for-Cabinet-Members-Website.pdf>

New Senior Management Staff

New heads of Corporate Services and Housing and Environment have been appointed. Paul Fielding will join the councils on 8 July as new Head of Housing and Environment. He joins from Portsmouth City Council. He has experience leading in environment, waste management and housing. Mark Minion will join on 2 August from Bedford Borough Council as Head of Corporate Services. He has experience leading in digital transformation, culture change, improving customer service and performance management. Both appointments were agreed unanimously by the Joint Staffing Committee.

Consultations

DEFRA

DEFRA is seeking views on two consultations: targets under the Environment Act 2021 to improve the natural environment: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/environment-act-2021-environmental-targets> and on sewage discharges from storm overflows: <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/water-industry/storm-overflows-discharge-reduction-plan/>

The targets for sewage discharges are woefully unambitious. Please consider providing a response – the Salmon and Trout Conservation Trust has an excellent response available online and other groups such as WASP and the Rivers Trust have also provided responses.

Register your interest in council consultations

You can get involved and have your say by registering on our consultation database of contacts that we use for engaging and consulting local communities on a variety of matters, from helping us to prepare a new council website to being formally consulted on new policies or plans.

If you want to receive notifications and updates of future council consultations, please register <https://survey.southandvale.gov.uk/s/consultationsignup/>

Boundary Commission for England

The Boundary Commission for England has arranged 32 public hearings for their second consultation on proposed new map constituencies in England.

Speaking slots are automatically reserved on the morning of the first day of the first hearing in each region for the official spokesperson of each of the qualifying political parties to present their party's views.

All the details on how you can respond and to book a speaking slot can be found via the [Boundary Commission's website](#).

Street naming consultation

The government is asking people to comment on proposals to alter process for changing street names. This includes replacing the current system with a single requirement for a residents' vote on any changes to street names and some changes to regulations and statutory guidance for councils. To find out more and to have your say visit <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/planning-reform-legislation/technical-consultation-on-street-naming/>

Oxfordshire Climate Change survey

The county council is running a survey to discover people's understanding of and opinions about climate change across Oxfordshire. This is part of a countywide project we're involved in to increase awareness of the impact of climate change and inspire behaviour change.

The survey results will be used to help develop a new online tool to help people across Oxfordshire find climate actions they can take which are relevant to them.

Residents can take part in the survey using these links: https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/climate-change/survey_tools/survey14870

Thames Update:

Walkers will be aware that the Environment Agency has closed the wooden footbridge south of Marsh Lock at Henley for urgent safety repairs. It is expected the works will take several weeks. Thames Path National Trail has implemented a diversion, but it is lengthy. Please be aware before you take visitors and guests, sadly you cannot get from Henley to Shiplake across Marsh Lock for the foreseeable future. [Thames Path- Henley Promenade open to Marsh Lock but footbridge closed beyond and diversion required - National Trails](#)