

## **OGP Policy Working Group: Background to Social Care**

Health and social care need to be reorganised into one properly integrated system with an emphasis on preventative health measures. Social care in Oxfordshire is inadequate, as it is all over the country, and needs to be adequately budgeted for.

### **Adult social care**

#### **What is happening in Oxfordshire now**

Because councils are poorly funded, they only pay the social care costs of the poorest in society, and most individuals have to pay some or all of the cost themselves, assessed on income and capital. Anyone with capital of £23,250 or over has to pay all the costs, with a sliding scale for part payment above £14,250.

This situation can really only be tackled nationally because tight local authority budgets leave almost no room for manoeuvre.

The delivery of adult social care in Oxfordshire (by the County Council) is now completely privatised, either contracted out to providers by the council or bought in privately. There are no local authority care homes or domiciliary care. Social care is therefore in the hands of profit-making companies, over which the local authority has very limited power.

Care homes as well as hospitals and all health and social care services are regulated and inspected nationally by the Care Quality Commission, which assesses whether homes are safe, effective, caring, responsive and well-led. It has the power to close homes that fail their inspections; however, homes can then reopen again under a new name but with the same problems. Some care companies are good, others not. The County Council keeps lists of care homes and domiciliary-care businesses but is not permitted to make recommendations.

Carers are poorly paid, and there is a large turnover of staff in consequence: 30–40% of domiciliary staff. Carers who deliver home care are often allowed insufficient paid travel time to move between clients, which further adds to the stress of the job.

#### **What the Green Party needs to do**

Provision in care homes could be improved with more monitoring by and involvement of residents' relatives, therefore the Green Party can press the council to encourage the setting up of a community support group in every home.

Some innovative schemes have been tried successfully in the past but have not been much in evidence recently, such as enabling older people in care homes and young children to spend time together, which is enriching for both; there could be more such schemes.

Other agencies and voluntary groups can be encouraged to get involved.

Rising unemployment provides an opportunity for more carers to be trained and employed, if the system can be better funded. Covid-19 has heightened public awareness of the value of care work, so now is a good time to focus on promoting and valuing the role of carers, and to call for greater investment in training and realistic pay.

## Children's services

Between 2013 and 2019 the number of children in care nationally increased by 15%, around triple the rate of population growth. In Oxfordshire the increase was much steeper, by 88%. (although it seems to have levelled off in the following year). In Oxfordshire as elsewhere, these figures have been attributed to:

- *greater awareness and referrals following high profile cases such as those involving sexual exploitation in Rotherham,*
- *increasing numbers of children who are vulnerable or at risk from female genital mutilation, County Lines, gang violence, child sexual exploitation, and radicalisation,*
- *better identification and understanding of children at risk, including domestic abuse, parental mental ill-health and parental substance misuse,*
- *an increased number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children,*
- *poverty and deprivation*
- *the decrease in the number of children leaving care*

(<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/children-and-families/CommissioningStrategyforLookedAfterChildrenPlacements2020-2025.pdf>, pp. 6–7)

It would seem likely, however, that the most important factor here is near the end of this list: poverty and deprivation, together with the decrease in support services that has resulted from years of cutbacks.

Only half of children in residential or foster care are provided for within the county, with most of the residential places outside Oxfordshire. Some children's homes are still run by the county, others are outsourced to private providers. Most Looked After children are cared for through fostering, which is also outsourced to private fostering companies, and the number of foster carers who work with the council has declined. There is a lack of foster places in north and west Oxfordshire especially.

All care is hugely expensive for the county, and residential homes especially so. Private fostering agencies are able to make large profits from finding homes for children in care.

Education services for Looked After Children are hugely important, as the educational achievements of these children generally fall shockingly short of those of their non-LAC peers. Every child in care now has a Personal Education Plan drawn up by the child's social worker, carer, parent and school, in consultation with the child. Oxfordshire County Council's Virtual School programme runs training and support for all professionals working with Looked After or adopted children and care leavers, engaging teachers, social workers, foster carers, police and health care and mental health professionals.

The project Oxfordshire Children - Young People & Families provides a home care service to children with a range of needs including learning and physical disabilities and health conditions. Many voluntary groups also offer help and support to families of children with a range of disabilities and needs.

### **What the Green Party needs to do**

Oxfordshire County Council itself recognises it is a priority to “Reduce the number of children needing to become looked after via targeted early help”. This is essential, and the council must be held to this. It plans to do it by “placing mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse workers in teams with children’s social workers to work with parents and support children to remain with their families”.

Greens should also:

- encourage the council to reduce the outsourcing of provision for looked-after children, and bring all provision back into the county and within 20 miles of home;
- monitor the council to ensure that all Looked After children receive the right mental, emotional and educational support.