

## **District Councillors report March 2025**

### **Latest on new Local Plan 2026-2041**

The new Local Plan has successfully completed all consultation stages and is now with a Planning Inspector. A list of 75 initial questions has been sent to SODC and later this year public hearings will be held.

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

The Government plans to abolish all county and district councils and replace them with new unitary councils. SODC is exploring two options – a single council for Oxfordshire and a combined council with Vale of White Horse and West

### **Budget 2025-26**

Diligent financial management has ensured that South Oxfordshire District Council can deliver a balanced budget for 2025-26 and marks the first time in nine years that the council has not needed to transfer funds from reserves.

This is great news bearing mind the council inherited a £3million deficit when they took over.

Major funding will be made available to support the purchase of more affordable housing across South Oxfordshire. Having already committed £10 million to provide more safe, secure and compliant housing, purchased under the Local Authority Housing Funding (LAHF) schemes, the district council has now committed to make a further £10 million available to support the council's long-term ambitions to meet local housing need.

The budget also includes funding to secure the future of the council's Community Hub on an ongoing basis. This valued service provides practical support and advice for those with cost-of-living concerns or who are finding life difficult.

Since launching in 2020, the Community Hub has supported thousands of residents across the district and provided more than £800,000 in vouchers and grants to households experiencing financial hardship. This has ensured people were able to pay vital energy bills and afford household essentials and food. A further £200,000 has been awarded to local voluntary and community organisations, helping them continue their invaluable support provided to residents.

The councillor grant budget will increase by 50%, to £7,500 per councillor while the Capital and Revenue grant schemes for voluntary organisations will continue for as long as possible until the new changes are in place, after which nothing is certain given that our grants programme is discretionary to SODC.

The Community Grants panel this year awarded more than £600,000 to eligible projects across the District however we were two thirds over-subscribed. It was a privilege once again though to hear the many presentations from amazing people doing amazing work in our communities. I had a long held assumption challenged when I learned that Citizens Advice Centres are entirely dependent on volunteers, donations and grants! Happily we were able to award them their total request.

The council will continue to fund an ongoing programme to improve leisure centres, including major decarbonisation & refurbishment projects at Thame Leisure Centre, such as solar panels, a sauna and gym equipment replacement. TLC opening hours will be maintained despite the high cost of energy, which renewables will help with.

Council tax for services provided by South Oxfordshire District Council will be set at £151.24 for a Band D property. This means just £2.91 per week for a wide range of services including waste and recycling collections, community support, leisure services, parks and play areas, housing and planning services, environmental health and licensing.

### **District Councillor Grants**

Councillor Ed Sadler and I were heavily over-subscribed this for our personal grant allocations however we were delighted to award grants towards:

Chinnor Heritage

Chinnor PC

Towersey PC

The Red Kite Family Centre

Jack and Jill Pre-School

Chinnor Village Centre

Thame Community Pride

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