

SODC ward councillors' report

Shiplake – 10th March 2025

Budget 2025-26 (Further Notes)

Diligent financial management has ensured that SODC 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. The budget was approved at the council meeting of 13th February.

Major capital 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 community grant budget will increase by 50%, to £7,500 per councillor while the Capital and Revenue grant schemes for voluntary organisations will continue.

SODC will continue to fund an ongoing programme to improve leisure centres, such as solar panels, and gym equipment replacement. Opening hours will be maintained despite the high cost of energy, helped by the new solar supply.

Household support voucher scheme

Since the new round of the Household Support Fund **opened for referrals there has been a very strong demand for voucher support across South Oxfordshire.**

SODC are working in partnership with many local organisations such as schools, food banks, voluntary and community organisations and advice centres to deliver the Household Support Fund scheme to those who need it most.

Local organisations already supporting South residents must submit a referral on behalf of their client directly to the Community Hub.

The current round of the Household Support Fund closes on 31 March (or sooner if all funds are fully allocated).

Oxfordshire County Council's Resident Support Scheme also remains open and distributing Household Support Fund to individuals and families. For more information visit [Residents Support Scheme](#).

Please help to spread the word to organisations in your ward. For more information contact our Community Hub team by calling 01235 422600 or emailing communitysupport@southandvale.gov.uk.

Bringing empty homes back into use

SODC are offering help to empty property owners so they can bring underused homes back into use for those who need them most. Measures include rent in advance, financial assistance towards refurbishment in some circumstances, and help with finding a tenant.

They're encouraging empty property owners to get in touch with them so they can discuss the benefits and options available. Where they become necessary there are also enforcement options.

Please help support our campaign by directing people to our webpages – see <https://www.southoxon.gov.uk/housing/empty-homes/> and share our social media messages.

Social housing allocation policy changes

The SODC public consultation on proposed changes to the Joint Housing Allocations Policy opened on 18 February. The policy underpins our work on providing homes to those who need them most, setting out the criteria to join the housing register and the rules for how social housing is allocated.

Last updated in 2019, the policy needs refreshing to reflect current housing priorities in the districts. There are four main proposed changes to the policy – all designed to help ensure no one is disadvantaged when it comes to allocating social housing.

Details on how to take part are on [Join The Conversation](#), the SODC Community Engagement website and the consultation runs until 11.59pm on Tuesday 18 March 2025. Please do help encourage people to share their views

Grant funding advice session

SODC are holding a grant funding advice session at Cornerstone Arts Centre in Didcot on **Thursday 20 March, appointments available from 12.30pm to 4pm**. Voluntary and community organisations will have the opportunity to discuss projects, ask questions about the application process including eligibility for any of the upcoming grant schemes.

Places are limited, so please encourage organisations to book a time slot by emailing grants@southandvale.gov.uk or phone 01235 422405. Alternatively, if unable to attend, the team are happy to book a phone call or Teams meeting at a more convenient time. Please help us to spread the word! [For more information visit our website.](#)

New affordable sustainable housing

Thanks to council funding and partnership work, residents have moved into some brand-new, energy efficient homes. Featuring solar panels and air source heat pumps that control underfloor heating as well as highly insulated structures and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery - there are even bat boxes to promote local wildlife!

Project partners housing association Soha Housing invited councillors and our affordable housing team to meet residents at the official opening of its new eco-friendly apartment building, Cullum House in Wheatley last month. More information is available on the Soha Housing website : [12 new affordable and sustainable apartments](#)

New plan to help power Oxfordshire using local renewable energy

As the UK transitions away from fossil fuels towards cleaner, renewable energy sources, the energy grid will need to adapt to store and distribute energy more efficiently, ensuring it is available where and when it is needed.

SODC has joined with neighbouring councils, under the [Future Oxfordshire Partnership](#), to deliver pioneering local area energy plans (LAEPs) for Oxfordshire, to address climate change and secure cleaner, more affordable energy for the county.

The plans will provide clear, strategic, and community-focused actions for transforming the way local energy such as wind and solar is generated, used, and managed, supporting both local and national climate goals.

Help shape new rules for charity collections in South Oxfordshire

Residents, charities and businesses in South Oxfordshire are encouraged to comment on a new policy for charity collections across the two districts.

Aimed at safeguarding donors and beneficiaries, ensuring fair access to collection opportunities and preventing unlicensed fundraising, the proposed policy introduces key measures, including:

- A requirement for applicants to provide detailed supporting material about their charity.
- Restrictions on where collections can take place to prevent blanket district-wide collections.
- A minimum of 80 per cent of money donated during house-to-house collections to go to the charitable cause.
- A fairer allocation of street collection opportunities.
- Clear grounds for refusing applications and licence revocations.

South Oxfordshire are keen to hear from local people and organisations to help shape the final version of the policy before it is implemented.

The consultation is open until 11.59pm on Wednesday 26 March 2025. For more information and to take part, visit southandvale.gov.uk/CharityCollectionsConsultation

[Mike Giles & Leigh Rawlins](#)

District Councillors